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DE FOIX;

OR,

SKETCHES OF THE MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

OF THE

FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

An Historical Romance.

BY ANNA ELIZA BRAY,
LATE MRS. CHARLES STOTHARD,

AUTHOR OF LETTERS WRITTEN DURING A TOUR THROUGH NORMANDY,
BRITANNY, AND OTHER PARTS OF FRANCE, IN 1818; MEMOIRS
OF THE LIFE OF THE LATE CHARLES ALFRED STOTHARD,
F.S.A. &c. &c. &c.

—Knights

Armed for lists—

—The minstraleie, the service at the feste,
The great geftes to the most and leste,
The rich array of Theseus' paleis,
And who sate first and last upon the deis,
What ladies fayrest ben or best dancing,
Or which of them can carole best or sing.—
Of all this make I mentioun.—

CHAUCER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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ERRATA.

- Line 8, page 9, *for* cost your life, *read* cost you life.
— 13, — 89, *for* speak the manner, *read* speak of the manner.
Last line, — 93, *for* destroyed, *read* distressed.
— 102, *for* nerve my arms, *read* nerve my arm.
Line 16, — 104, *for* bowed as she retired from the chamber,
read bowed her out of the chamber.
— 12, — 108, *for* was conceived, *read* was ever conceived.
— 22, — 166, *for* claim his rights to save thee, *read* claim
his rights, to save thee.
— 12, — 178, *for* God bless you, *read* God bless me.
— 14, — 279, *for* ou, *read* on.

DE FOIX.

CHAPTER I.

THE ASSIGNATION.

And banished I am, if but from thee.
Go, speak not to me ; even now be gone—
Oh, go not yet !—Even thus two friends condemned
Embrace, and kiss, and take ten thousand leaves,
Loather a hundred times to part than die.
Yet now farewell ; and farewell life with thee.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE evening of that day, whose busy events we have recorded in the two last chapters, closed in with all the beauty of a summer's glowing sunset, in that delightful country where the provinces of Foix and Bearn are situated. Already had the birds sought the shelter of their airy nests in the thick surrounding woods, whose ample foliage was now seen but in one huge

mass of dusky brown. The husbandman had retired to his home, whilst the light that glimmered through the casement of his little dwelling spread far its cheering ray. The fields were deserted, save by the watch-dog and the fold: the streets of town and village were empty and silent; and the warder paced his round upon the turrets of each feudal castle. The sky was yet tinged with a glow of crimson light in the west, when the moon, that glorious regent of the night, slowly rose in tranquil majesty, and sailing through a flood of white and circling clouds, that seemed like a veil upon the brow of beauty, she at length burst from their shadow, and appeared at once, in the full effulgence of her light, pursuing her course, and rising into the vault of heaven; whilst myriads of silver stars congregated around her, as if in homage to their queen; and the whole face of the earth, and the bosom of the waters, were suddenly lighted up by the reflection of her splendour.

The hour now approached when the Count de Montpensier was to fulfil the appointed meeting with Isabel, in order to bid a last adieu

to the high-minded but unfortunate Jane of Boulogne. The young prince, who perfectly well understood the full meaning of Isabel's letter (as she had always been the confidant of the lovers), prepared, with an anxious and palpitating heart, to take this sad farewell. Agos de Guisfort was to attend him; for although that esquire could not comprehend the force of real love, yet was he fully sensible of the virtue of fidelity.

The Count threw his mantle about his shoulders, and Agos, who placed little faith either in the honour of some of the chief inhabitants of the castle, or in the prudence of his master, examined his own dagger ere he fastened it upon his side, and prepared to bear John de Montpensier company as far as the western tower, resolving to watch as a guard without till he should return from the interview, which Agos perfectly understood, although made in the name of Isabel de Greilly, was to take place with Jane of Boulogne.

Whilst the Count and his esquire were thus awaiting till the castle bell should have struck

the appointed hour to sally forth, another, and yet more unfortunate being, was also awaiting the same signal, with even a more intense anxiety of expectation, though from so opposite a cause. This unhappy being was Eustace, whose late conversation with the artful Prior must be remembered by the reader. This night was for ever to decide the fate of Eustace. Isabel had long cherished his hopes, had long played with his feelings; yet in the midst of all his sufferings, his love had hitherto triumphed over the inward workings of jealousy, and the secret whispers of malignity. He had still believed her, though wayward and capricious, true of heart. This night was to be the test; for should she now disappoint him, and actually admit the prince (whom she had hitherto declared she esteemed but as a valiant knight), Eustace could no longer doubt her perfidy. Yet ever amiable, even in the moments of the bitterest feeling, he meditated no revenge; he resolved but to break the spell that bound him to a light-hearted woman, and to leave her, whatever might be his own sufferings, for ever.

Even in the midst of these distresses, the injunctions of the mysterious Franciscan had not escaped his mind; although he now felt the desire he had entertained to know the secret of his birth, but as a sickly hope. For the love of Isabel, Eustace had hitherto cherished the wish that he might one day prove himself of noble parentage. What would now avail the discovery, when he was about to lose her for ever? What then would be to him those honours, that may add to happiness, but cannot constitute it? Still, when he should leave Orthes, he purposed to obey the Franciscan, and to seek the unknown person, who was to reveal to him the story of his birth at the fortress of Lourde.

This was indeed a night of fearful decision. Eustace felt its import with all that terrible anxiety and emotion which ever accompanies the suspense of a dreadful expectation, of whose certain occurrence we are almost assured, whilst still we cherish the lingering hope that it may not be; for Eustace possessed, to a very high degree, that acute feeling which generally ac-

companies superior intellect, and whose nature is wholly incomprehensible to the common mass of mankind. In anxious expectation, wishing the castle bell might strike the hour, yet dreading to hear it sound, Eustace lingered under the shade of the pendant acacia, from which situation he commanded a full view of the western towers and turrets of the castle.

Near the spot, wrapped in the mantle of his order, sculked the cunning Prior, who thus, as it were, lay in ambush, ready, if necessary, to break upon the sorrows of the unhappy Eustace, and to work his mind to jealousy and desperation should he evince any symptoms of an altered purpose. Philip watched like the evil spirit in the garden of our first parents, for the sole purpose of working destruction. His intents, dark as his character, sought the shade of night, and carefully avoiding wherever a ray of moonlight illumined with its clear and sober beams the walks and plantations of the garden, he cowered within a rocky recess, overhung with trees, impervious to the noontide sun, and now shrouded in total darkness.

At length the bell told the midnight hour. Eustace started at its sound, and advanced some paces nearer in the direction towards the tower. The Prior wrapped his mantle still closer round him, and stepped forward to the very extremity of his den, like the wolf who prepares to sally on his prey. Two figures were now seen gliding cautiously forward, silent and watchful in their course; at length they came before the little portal of the tower that opened on the garden, and there stopped, but without word or sign. A light glimmered in the window above, and the lattice was softly unclosed, when the delicate figure of the lovely Isabel de Greilly was distinctly visible as she looked through the casement, and then exclaimed, "My Lord de Montpensier, Heaven be praised, you are come in safety! I will admit you instantly:" and closing the lattice, she withdrew. The light disappeared, and in a few moments the little portal beneath was cautiously opened. One of the persons immediately entered, and the door was closed, whilst the other remained without,

and slowly paced up and down before the entrance.

Eustace, who witnessed what had passed, with a mind wrought almost to distraction, resolved to be yet farther satisfied that the object of this meeting was really Isabel: he rushed forward, and scarcely knowing what he did, was about to demand instant admission at the portal, when Agos de Guisfort suddenly unsheathed his dagger, and placed himself in the pathway that led to the door.

“Stand!” he exclaimed, “stand, whoever you are: forbear to advance another step, or you die upon the spot!”

The dagger glittered in the moonlight that played upon its blade, and the powerful strength of Agos had seized upon Eustace with one hand, as he held the brandished instrument of death within the other. Eustace immediately recognised the bold squire, and only answered, “I fear not death, I am unarmed, and cannot cope with you; but for mercy’s sake let me pass to yonder portal.”

“You pass not thither,” replied Agos, “whilst I hold this steel; I know you, you are Sir Eustace, the new made knight, and a brave one too. Do not therefore provoke me, for I would not harm, with my own will, a hair of your head; yet, brave as you are, an unarmed knight is no match for a well guarded squire. Do not, therefore, madly attempt an act that must cost your life; for my duty to the master whom I serve, can suffer no man to pass within yon portal, but on the peril and forfeit of his life. Forbear, therefore, young sir, and pledge me your honour as a knight, that you will not attempt it, and I will let you go free with all courtesy.”

Eustace was unarmed, and incapable of contending with the Herculean strength of Agos de Guisfort, whose dagger at his throat, and powerful grasp to boot, gave him no choice. Resistance would have been as mad as it was useless; he therefore gave the promise required, and Agos immediately unloosed his hold.

“You are something disordered,” said Agos to the youth; “you tremble; it was not thus

you matched the proud bastard at the tournament."

"I tremble not from fear," replied Eustace; "but there are circumstances which can craven a spirit that never shook before the sword. You are a faithful adherent of the Count de Montpensier; when will he return from yonder tower?"

"At his own pleasure," answered Agos; "and I never yet knew that it was a part of fidelity to communicate the intentions of a master, or a friend, for mine is both to me."

"I do not ask them," said Eustace: "I demanded but the time he would quit the tower."

"And that," replied Agos, "may depend on circumstances."

"Is the Count's business, then," inquired Eustace, "so important with the Lady Isabel de Greilly, who but now admitted him, that it may occasion any extraordinary delay?"

Agos rejoiced to hear these words, as he feared from the manner in which Eustace had attempted to enter the tower, that he really knew

the assignation was intended for Jane of Boulogne; a thing that, if known, might cost De Montpensier his life: he resolved therefore to confirm Eustace in his suspicions of Isabel; for it must be remembered that the recent displeasure of the Count de Foix, and his banishment of Eustace, had been kept secret by the Count's own order, (excepting from the Prior, Sir Evan, and Sir Espaign du Lyon); no wonder, therefore, Agos de Guisfort feared to trust Eustace, who was still generally considered as De Foix's chief favourite. He therefore replied to the youth, in something like a confidential tone, "Why, truly, when damsels, such as the Lady Isabel, admit fair young knights into their apartments at midnight, it is somewhat difficult to say how long they may be detained there; for tender adieus are none of the briefest conference, especially when made by the desire of a lady."

"Is this meeting, then," said Eustace, greatly shocked at the light manner in which Agos, with his blunt speech, had alluded to it, "is it actually made by the desire of the Lady Isabel?"

"Why, by whom else, think you," replied

Agos, “should it be made? Do ladies write letters, look out of casements, and unbar doors for the pleasure of their waiting damsels? or would the young Count, my master, venture the hazard of a midnight rencontre for any fair face, save such a one as belongs to that blithe, merry, and buxom damsel, the Lady Isabel. No, no, I am not a watch to guard the pass for the loves of any less than a valiant prince, and a noble lady!”

“Do they *love*, then?” exclaimed Eustace, in a voice of such emotion, that even Agos was struck by its peculiar expression; but imputing it to a cause of interest only as far as it related to the discovery of an important secret, he went on, with a view still farther to deceive Eustace, in the confirmation of his suspicions. “Do they love? ay, truly do they! as never knight and damsel loved before; and but for this ill-blood which exists between the old Duke de Berry and my Lord de Foix, about that foolish affair of Toulouse, the young Count had long ere this asked the Lady Isabel in marriage; but as it is, I suppose they must play the lover’s old game,

deceive all around, Count, foe, and friend, part for the present, but only to make a future meeting more sure, when, as husband and wife, parting being, perhaps, the thing most desired, like many other desirable things, will not be to be had at all."

"Deceive Count, foe, and friend!" thought Eustace. "Isabel has indeed deceived a friend; but one who would have given life itself to serve her." So completely was he overwhelmed by the agony of contending feelings, which this communication had called up, that he could no longer reply to Agos without betraying his emotions. And now assured that Isabel was indeed false, and that he had no more to learn in confirmation of the dreadful truth, he uttered a few inarticulate words, and abruptly quitting Agos, rushed from the spot. As Eustace was hastening on without thought or purpose, and only anxious to fly from a place that offered nothing but misery to his mind, he encountered the Prior. Philip crossed his path, and arrested his steps. Eustace without heeding the interruption, and scarcely knowing what he did, in

his frenzy struck the Prior, and nearly pushed him to the ground as he endeavoured to pass, when the Benedictine, starting up, exclaimed in a voice of anger and authority, "Stop, madman, stop! wherefore this to me? am I the cause that your eyes have told you a truth they loved not to look upon?"

"You are, you are," said Eustace; "I would have rather died in ignorance, than lived to prove her false; unhand me, let me go, speak not to me, I am not myself, leave me to my purpose."

"To what purpose?" answered Philip; "you have none: you wander like a creature escaped from the hand that rules a frenzied soul. I will not leave you to destruction."

"Then save me from it!" exclaimed Eustace: "tell me the letter was an idle tale, that I am not deceived, that these eyes have not helped to betray me to my ruin; that yonder creature was not Isabel who received the Count, but some fiend, though cased in an angel's form, to drive me to despair!"

"Alas!" answered Philip, "this is mere frenzy; I would counsel you with sober truth."

“ Not now,” said Eustace ; “ not now : leave me, I beseech you ; leave me.”

“ What !” replied Philip, “ leave you, that you may return again to watch the opening of yon portal, when you shall see the weeping Isabel take her last fond farewell of the happy Count !”

“ Talk not thus,” exclaimed Eustace wildly, “ talk not thus, or you will make me mad. I cannot answer for the consequence.”

“ Why, this is madness indeed !” said the Prior ; “ you are unarmed, and yet you place your hand upon your girdle, as if to draw a weapon : and on whom would you draw it ? If you need a dagger, I have one ; and he who has robbed you of your mistress, and taught her to deceive you, may be a fitter person to try its point upon than the friend who watched the blindness of your passion, only to give it sight, and to save you from the total darkness of error, when the remedy would come too late.”

Eustace shuddered, as the Prior hinted to him a purpose so foul and base, when he spoke of De Montpensier. “ What !” he at length exclaimed, after an effort to subdue his feelings,

“would you, Philip, in these moments of agony and frenzy, work upon my mind, to make me commit a deed of murder, like the midnight assassin who stabs in the dark! I had scarce a meaning when I placed my hand upon my girdle; yet, if any foul thought unconsciously prompted the action, it could but aim against myself.”

“I understand you,” answered the Prior; “and would such an act then be no murder?”

“Ay, truly would it,” said Eustace, “be murder most impious; for who shall dare rush uncalled before his Maker? Sin that forbids repentance is of the darkest dye; the self-devoted victim can scarcely hope for mercy; for he cuts off the only condition upon which it is attained.”

“Heaven be praised, my son,” replied Philip, “that once more you speak the words of reason! No, there are other persons who better merit death; and who, did they receive it from your weapon, would lose but their life in justice: yonder Count, who has betrayed you, deserves to fall by your hand.”

“But not when it wields a dagger in the dark

to slay him," said Eustace. "Leave me, tempter; and work not upon my mind in these terrible moments to do a deed that fiends only could rejoice at. I have lost all that I can lose, by the perfidy of man: my faith in Heaven, and the honour of my mind, are my own; they are all that I have left; and I will not part with them to satisfy even the inexorable feelings of jealousy and revenge."

"You will then," said the Prior sarcastically, "show a true Christian spirit of forbearance and charity; and the Count having gained the love of your Isabel, you will help him, perhaps, to the possession of his prize."

"No," replied Eustace, "Isabel is false; I will fly from her; to forget, I fear, is impossible. I leave her to her choice; she may have deceived De Montpensier as she has me: I leave her to the will of Heaven, and to that deep and goading remorse, which, when the stings of an awakened conscience shall one day make her feel, will more than revenge the injured Eustace. Yet, even then, she shall find I ceased not to love her, and to pray Heaven to pity and forgive her. I will

write her my last farewell—my forgiveness ; and then I bid for ever adieu to these scenes of my early happiness and final misery.”

The Prior, who was anxious by any means to get rid of Eustace, as an insurmountable obstacle in the paths of his own busy intrigues, approved this determination ; for it was, in fact, chiefly with a view to get rid of him that he had vainly endeavoured to work Eustace to the murder of De Montpensier (an act that would have been punished with death) ; the Prince, also, for many reasons, was obnoxious to the Prior.

Eustace returned to his own chamber, and having written a letter, in which he bid for ever farewell to Isabel de Greilly, the Prior promising it should be conveyed to her on the morrow, he hastily put on his armour, and binding a small wallet, which had been before prepared for his departure, upon his saddle, without the company of any attendant, and without bidding farewell even to Philip, he mounted his courser, gave the pass-word to the warder, who let him through the great gates, and long before the sun arose to illumine the turrets of

the castle, he had quitted its walls, with the intent never to view them more.

We shall not here attempt to describe the parting scene that took place between the Count de Montpensier and Jane of Boulogne : suffice it to say, it was such as might be expected, where minds are congenial and hearts united in the bond of affection ; yet of the two the Count was certainly the least afflicted, as he left the fair Jane, still cherishing in his breast the lovers' creed of hope. Whilst Jane, whose firmness of spirit was of the most heroic kind, had not communicated to De Montpensier the oath she had taken at the desire of De Foix, lest the knowledge of that circumstance should tempt the young prince to some rash and dangerous altercation with the Count : she felt, therefore, though she did not speak it, that, from the nature of her oath, this parting must be for ever.

Isabel de Greilly, after De Montpensier had quitted the tower in safety, followed by his trusty Agos, hastened to descend into the garden, and went without delay towards the acacia trees, in the hope to find Eustace, thinking he would not

have left the spot, although so long after the appointed hour; but she found no one: all was still and serene; the acacias waved their graceful boughs, as the night air gently stirred them; the moon shone bright, and reflected a thousand diamond hues in the little stream hard by, that murmured over the rocks with its bright and sparkling waters: there were no sounds save these; and, mortified and disappointed, now angry with herself, and now reproaching Eustace for having so soon left the spot, poor Isabel returned to the western tower, where she sought the pillow of repose, but found not the rest it confers.

CHAPTER II.

THE COUNTERPLOT.

I am undone ; there is no living, none,
If Bertram be away——

—— 'Twas pretty, though a plague,
To see him every hour, to sit and draw
His arched brows, his hawking eye, his curls,
In our heart's table ; heart too capable
Of every line, and trick of his sweet favour ;
But now he's gone, and my idolatrous fancy
Must sanctify his relics.

SHAKESPEARE.

UPON the morning after that night, whose many anxieties had kept Isabel from sleep, she arose much disordered. An unusual oppression weighed upon her heart, and quenched the light of that cheerful and animated spirit which had hitherto formed the distinction and charm of her character, and must be pleaded as some palliation for her errors. The lively in soul often commit a thousand faults, and utter a thousand follies, from the mere exuberance of animal

spirits, which are apt to interfere with a steady principle of action: they have no bad design, nor improper feeling, although they sometimes subject themselves to the reproof of the more sedate, and always to the censures of those cold and heartless critics upon human actions, who, constantly following the direction of a calculating motive in whatever they do themselves, are apt to judge their fellow-creatures by the standard of their own character. Lively people are seldom dangerous; if they do mischief, it is from want of thought; whilst the subtle, the crafty, and the selfish, are generally found to be of a staid and thoughtful temper: yet it must be admitted, that an intercourse with the world will afford some worthy exceptions to these general remarks, which are offered more in excuse for Isabel de Greilly, than to throw any disparagement upon the good and grave part of mankind.

Not long after Isabel quitted her chamber, the farewell letter Eustace had indited was conveyed to her; and the effect its contents produced upon her feelings may be more easily conceived than described. She now found that

by her own thoughtless conduct, she had driven for ever from her, under the most painful misapprehensions, one who loved her with the sincerest affection, and who possessed a greater interest in her heart than she was even herself aware of till this moment. So wayward and weak is human nature, that the things we slight whilst within our power, we feel we cannot too dearly prize when they are lost.

The absence of Eustace, under these painful circumstances, appeared insupportable to Isabel. Absence and calamity are, perhaps, the truest of all the tests of affection; for whilst absence extinguishes the flame of a newly-kindled or slight regard, it causes that which is deeply seated, to burn with renovated force; and calamity, that chills the heart of holiday acquaintance, brings but nearer to us, in the hour of affliction, those who are truly friends.

Sensitive alike in pleasure and in pain; incapable of feelings that hold on the equal course of mediocrity, the grief of Isabel was as acute and overwhelming as her enjoyments had been lively and animated. She had neither the firm-

ness necessary to contemplate evils, nor the fortitude to sustain them when they occurred. She thought only of present misery, without a reflection on past happiness, or a hope to cheer future expectation. She gave herself up, therefore, to the storm of unresisted sorrow.

Jane of Boulogne, who knew well the character of her friend, did not attempt to stem the force of her feelings; but deemed it better to let the tears and complaints of poor Isabel have their full course, till the tempest of her grief should in some measure be exhausted by its own violence, when the calm which she hoped would succeed it, might afford a fitter season for the offices of consolatory friendship.

The pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Ann's, and the previous visit to St. Mary's of Orthes, which Isabel had hitherto consented to undertake, more from kindness to the Lady Jane, and to bear her company, than from any desire of her own for such a visit, she now embraced with holy fervour. Thus enthusiastic in all her feelings and purposes, she went from one extreme to the other; and was most likely, in such a frame of mind, to

become the zealous devotee of that cloistered state which Philip had so earnestly desired should be her ultimate destination.

Isabel, deeply afflicted, and giving full vent to her feelings; and Jane, equally unhappy, but more resigned and composed in her sorrows; each sharing in the confidence of the other; prepared to set forward at the appointed hour, upon the pilgrimage which each piously hoped would be peculiarly acceptable to Heaven at such a time of grief and humiliation; and the circumstance of so great a similarity existing in their mutual sufferings, and in their fate, but rendered these friends more dear to each other. We shall now leave them, and return to the Monastery of St. Mary at Orthes; as it is time to think of the young page.

There was about Will of the West, a quickness of apprehension, a presence of mind, and a boldness of spirit, that rendered him a peculiarly fit subject for any enterprise that required courage and dexterity: he was neither slow to observe, nor fearful to undertake. The cheerfulness of his temper, and the very good opinion he enter-

tained of his own qualities, both mental and personal, although they gave his manners something of a gay impudent air; yet they were withal so mixed with good humour and pleasantry, that persons felt on the whole more amused than displeased with the pertness and sauciness of the handsome, gay English page. William had also another quality which is apt to gain the good-will of others: he was on all occasions desirous to make himself useful and obliging. This arose both from his natural wish to please, and also from a love of displaying those talents whose superiority he considered unrivalled by any page of the time.

A character such as we have just described, in one who, although still a boy, had been trained up in the agile and hardy exercises of chivalry, was not likely to be daunted by an enterprise, which many an older and graver head would have considered well ere they undertook it. Confident in his own powers, his address, and his spirit, and not less confident of the favourable manner in which such a service must be received by the ladies, for whom it was under-

taken, William, without even reflecting upon the probability of failure, had already settled in his own mind, the success of his delivery of the beauteous damsels from the cunning of the Prior, and the violence of Sir Evan de Foix.

Yet he was not so rashly confident as to overlook the more minute steps by which this deliverance must be achieved, and as difficulty afforded a scope for the exercise of his inventive faculties, and his address, it is most probable, that the very prospect of having to overcome them by his own wit, gave but a greater zest to the adventure, like a school-boy, who thinks no apples so sweet as those which he steals by breaking through hedges or scaling walls.

Having well thought upon his plan, and deliberated upon all the preliminaries, it will, perhaps, scarcely be believed (yet such was the fact) that there seemed to the confident young page but one material difficulty, and this arose from not knowing where he should be able to find, or to secure the palfreys of the ladies, when he should have carried these damsels in safety as

far as the Prior's garden gate ; for the horses that he was assured would there be found in readiness, would be equipped for male riders only ; and William saw the necessity of carrying off the ladies before the appointed hour of compline, as, if he staid till that time, he was sure to be interrupted in his expedition. This, therefore, was a sad stumbling-block ; for he knew not how a lady could manage such high-mettled horses as those appointed for Sir Evan de Foix, whilst they were running at a swift gallop ; which he was certain would be necessary to secure escape.

But William was not of a temper to be daunted by difficulty, and finding no present means of overcoming that which he had in contemplation, he turned from the subject to more pleasing thoughts ; “ For,” said he, with his usual self-complacency, “ the ladies will be under my protection ; and having safely carried them through so many dangers out of the ward of that cunning old priest, it would be extraordinary, indeed, if *I* should fail to complete the work

of deliverance, merely from this obstacle of the horses. No; this thing will give place to my invention, as well as other difficulties have done."

Thus self-satisfied, Will forgot that these difficulties had only given place in his imagination, and that the actual success of the enterprise was yet to be proved. Our young Page commenced his plan of deliverance by employing the interval between the time of his discovery of the plot of Sir Evan de Foix and the Prior, and that destined for its execution, by ingratiating himself as much as possible with Bernardin, in order that the worthy compounder of drugs, who now acted as keeper of the prisoner, might be rendered less cautious of his charge; and it has already been observed, he was somewhat lax in the duties of his office, else had the secret door which led to the passage never been left unbarred and forgotten.

Most men, from those who sit on the throne of kings, down to the humble mechanic in his stall, (being all creatures of one nature, though differently shaped in their condition by the fortunes of the world), have their favourite pro-

pensity or inclination, which may be irritated by contradiction or soothed by indulgence ; in short, most people have what is called a *blind side* ; and this was the case with Brother Bernardin, who, although wholly insensible to those commendations for piety, humility, abstinence, &c. &c. which most churchmen are supposed to glory in hearing and repeating, was quite alive to the praises bestowed upon his various talents for astronomy, distillery, and such like ; and above all his vanity was tickled at being flattered on the score of his medicinal skill, a praise which some impertinent people having presumed to question, was always peculiarly acceptable to the ears of the leech. Just as men who possess a doubtful talent for doing a thing well they would be fond of being able to do at all, would rather hear that doubtful talent praised, than the most finished and assured accomplishment which they really possessed.

Will of the West, who was both keen-sighted and cunning, soon found out the blind side of his keeper ; and applying to that as the surest means of gaining favour, he actually carried his complaisance so far as to say, he not only should

be delighted to receive Bernardin's instructions in the art of physic, but that he would assist him in the composition and decomposition of drugs, potions, &c. &c. for the benefit of mankind; and that he already so highly esteemed the learning of the leech, and was so assured of the efficacy of his medicine, that he almost longed to receive the whipping in order to try its effects.

Will's flattery was laid on with such an unsparing hand, and, like many prodigals, he went so far beyond the mark, that he had soon cause to wish he had not been quite so lavish, but had kept something in reserve. For Bernardin, in order to gratify these aspirations of the Page in the knowledge of the medical art, immediately commenced his instructions, lectures, and dissertations, and set the young rogue to work; so that Will feared he should not have a moment's leisure for carrying on his plan. The lecture ended, the Page was set by the learned monk to the task of beating and pounding some rare drug with a brazen pestle and mortar. He made all haste to get through the task; and having most successfully knocked out the bottom of the

mortar, for want of understanding the true principle of resistance, (for Will had pounded with the mortar between his knees,) Bernardin good humouredly pardoned the error in his young disciple; and, to prevent its future recurrence, declared, that as he, being a leech, was considered a sort of privileged person, and also from the many offices he held in the house, he would therefore, upon the present evening, forego attendance at compline, in order to explain to Will the true principle of resistance, and some other useful philosophical points. "For philosophy and the craft of physic," said Bernardin, "are of near kindred; they are, indeed, like the head and the hand, members of the same body; the one dictates, whilst the other operates."

This intimation was a terrible and unexpected obstacle to all the plans of the young page. It was necessary the ladies should be warned of their danger, and make their escape before the hour of compline, and Bernardin had given up the thoughts of attending that last vesper of the evening service, purely to oblige Will with his company and instructions. "A plague upon

lying!" thought the page; "what business had I to pretend an interest in his pestles and drugs? I wish his lectures might choak him, so that I could but get out." Yet there was no remedy. Time will neither wait the designs of kings, nor the plots of pages; and it flew on with its usual swiftness; which, by the way, makes us somewhat doubt the propriety of that custom artists have of allegorically painting Time as an old man; for he undoubtedly possesses more the properties of youth than age, those of swiftness and unwearied flight.

Time then fled fast; it was within an hour of compline, an interval that the fraternity employed in the refectory; but Bernardin was immoveably fixed in his great, high-backed, oaken chair, holding forth, amongst other topics, upon the principle of resistance; the right aspect of the stars for compounding drugs; at what turn of a comet's tail it was best to bleed or physic a patient; on the nature of vegetable decoctions; and, lastly, upon that of the vintage. Now, as there are some certain combination of ideas that lead to action in a manner as mechanical, and

almost as imperceptibly to ourselves, as in walking we put one leg before the other, without being conscious upon what principle we do so, whilst the mind is absorbed in other matters ; so in the present case, at the mention of the vintage, Bernardin appeared to rise up mechanically, and his arms seeming to be conscious for what purpose his legs were in motion, and had borne him across the room, raised themselves as mechanically to take down from a shelf a flagon that stood filled with the cheering companion of the leech's studies. It might be called his Muse ; for never was Bernardin known to invoke its power without receiving the certain inspiration of renewed animal spirits, which often emanate from the stomach, and settle in the head, by a flood of generous liquor passing down the throat.

Bernardin, flattered by the acquisition of so hopeful a pupil as our page, to whom he could dictate with all the assured authority of wisdom, teaching ignorance without fear of contradiction, and having talked till he had himself become astonished at the flow of his own eloquence, felt in so jovial and well-disposed a humour, that he

resolved to make this evening one of more than ordinary enjoyment; and pouring out a brimming cup both for himself and the page, he most cordially pressed his young companion to prove himself a man, and drink till the bottom of the cup should be naked for very lack of liquor.

Will, in a sort of despair, swallowed the contents even before the worthy monk had emptied his own goblet; who, turning towards the page with a look of mingled surprise and commendation, exclaimed, in a voice of exultation, "Bravely tossed off! By the holy well of St. Winifred, I see thou hast in thee the true spirit of a jovial fellow; one who will not let his friend's cup lack replenishment for want of a companion to fill up his own. Come, shall we have a carouse? We have this day laboured hard in our vocation, and 'tis right fitting that we should taste some comfort to help to renew those animal functions of the body which are apt to become exhausted by the exertions of the mind. What say you to a spiced cup of hippocras, my dainty young page?" continued Bernardin, winking his

eye, as he rubbed his hands, and smiled with a complaisant air ; “ such cups are not to be had within the walls of all monasteries ; but brother Bernardin knows how to spice a wine flagon as well as to compound a potion.”

“ I should much relish the hippocras,” replied William, into whose head a wicked thought, at this moment, obtruded itself ; “ but prithee let me spice it ; I have sometimes done that office for my Lord de Foix himself, who acknowledges I have the right craft, that I mingle just the true quantity of spice to a scruple, without wanting a grain more or less in measure.”

“ Then thou shalt do it,” answered Bernardin, “ look ye, do you mark yonder niche.”

“ What,” said the page, “ where there stands a crucifix, with the death’s head hanging above it?”

“ Ay, even that niche,” replied Bernardin ; “ remove the crucifix, and take down the skull that hangs upon the peg, and you shall find the jaws of death give way to the comforts of life ; for that peg acts as a key that opens a little cupboard of most precious and comfortable contents.

'There you will find both the wine and the spices; take my cup and your own, and mingle them as you list.'

The page lost not a moment in obeying the commands of the leech, who had thus fenced with the solemn emblems of mortality and superstition, the little private deposit of his own luxurious indulgence, and which, in the openness of his heart, in an unusual fit of conviviality, he had thus betrayed to our page. The high back of the leech's chair served to screen Will (as it stood against the direction of the niche) from the observation of his new master in the learned crafts; and mixing the spices with the wine, he hastily took from his own pouch the phial containing that extraordinary narcotic which had been bestowed upon him as a precious gift by the medical brother. He pulled out the cork with a trembling hand, and instantly poured the contents into Bernardin's cup. This William boldly presented to his companion, and extending the cup, the page impudently exclaimed, "Come, pledge me, brother, to our

better acquaintance, and to the worthy success of that precious drug you bestowed upon me but yesterday."

"With all my heart," answered Bernardin, "may it prosper your wishes, and ease you of your pains!"

Bernardin raised the cup to his lips and swallowed the contents, whilst Will of the West stood gazing upon him with a mixture of anxiety and exultation, till he saw the good man's head thrown quite back, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and the bottom of the cup forming a parallel line with his nose. The cup was drained to the last drop, and Bernardin talked on at first with his accustomed fluency; then anon he continued with short pauses in his discourse, and his head made sudden nods and dips between the sentences; whilst his voice grew still lower and lower, as the sentences became more unconnected and inarticulate. At length the worthy man's head sunk quite back in his chair; his eyes were fast closed, his hands fell motionless by his side; and, in fine, so profound was his sleep, that but

for a heavy breath or two, which he now and then drew, and the deep nasal symphony of the Monk's repose, Bernardin might have been deemed as fixed an image of mortality as any one actually wrapped within the arms of death. So powerful were the effects of the leech's own narcotic, which had thus been administered to himself; and perhaps this was the first time in all his life that he had compounded a potion which was likely to answer any useful purpose.

"He sleeps," murmured the page, "I have not an instant to lose." William then immediately possessed himself of the keys, both of the church and of the Prior's private garden, using the precaution to hang up others (which he removed from the right place) upon the vacated pegs, that the confusion of wrong keys might delay Sir Evan de Foix when he should be about to use them. The page then took down from a shelf a large black mantle of the Benedictine rule, which Bernardin, according to custom, used to wear in the church. This Will wrapped carefully about his person, so as entirely to conceal his dress beneath. And

having taken the girdle, with the utmost composure, from off the sleeping brother, he girt the mantle round his own waist. He then drew the hood or cowl closely round his head, and just left a sufficient opening for the purpose of seeing and drawing breath. These precautions taken, William next placed some cushions that were in the apartment upon the oaken bench, and threw over them a loose coverlid which had served him on the previous night. He then stuck his own page's cap upon the cushion, at the head, and drew the coverlid close around it, and could hardly forbear laughing at this contrivance of his own to imitate himself asleep, which he designed should help to deceive Bernardin, in case he awoke in the dusk of the evening, before himself and the ladies were well escaped from St. Mary's.

All was now ready; William delayed not a moment, and raising the tapestry, he left the apartment through the narrow passage before described. He passed the chamber in safety, and had made his way as far as the cloisters without interruption (for the monks had not yet

quitted the refectory), when he perceived a figure advancing towards him, and who must of necessity cross his path. It was now neither light nor dark, but just that time of evening when objects appear of a blackish hue, and indistinct in their character. By the long garments of the figure which was advancing, William had no doubt but it was that of some stray brother of the flock. There was nothing to be done but to remain where he was; for, having been observed by this person, whoever he might be, a retreat that would excite suspicion was more dangerous than boldly to stand his ground.

“ I only hope,” thought William, “ this monk may be under a penance of silence, and pass without speaking to me. But if he do speak, one of my old tricks must serve my turn. And we will soon see if I have forgot the art of mumming or not.”

Now, in order that these reflections of the young page may be intelligible to the reader, we must inform him that Will of the West was endowed with a certain monkey-like talent, called mimickry : a thing which, when a child, had pro-

cured him the reputation of a great genius with his parents, and that of a bright wit, or a wonderfully clever boy, amongst their admiring friends; who had no objection to partake of the good people's hospitality, whilst lavishing their flattering commendations upon little master Will's rare talents for mimickry and mumming. So that he had once been fixed upon to perform the part of Eve in a sacred mystery: and, since grown to riper years, being particularly expert in mischief, he had often played the Devil in the holy dramas at Orthes.

Will therefore resolved, if need were, to have recourse to this talent upon the present occasion, and to use a feigned voice, as the ample folds of the mantle in which he was enveloped, and the dusk of the evening, promised a sufficient security against the recognition of his person. The figure having caught a glimpse of William, immediately advanced towards him, and, in somewhat an abrupt tone and manner, demanded who he was? The page now recollected the sharp voice of John the Chronicler, for such, in fact, was the person who addressed him. Will remained

silent. Again John demanded who he was, but in something of a lower tone; "for," added he, still more softly, "if you are the person I take you to be, you need not fear speaking to me."

"I am the person you take me to be," answered the Page, in a feigned voice, and speaking in an under tone.

"Am I to *understand* you to be such?" said the Chronicler, in a significant manner, as he nodded his head.

"You may so understand it," replied William, with a like significant nod.

"Have you seen the Prior or Sir Evan, then?" added John.

"I have both seen and heard them too," continued the impudent page.

"Then," said John, "they are both now waiting in the Prior's own chamber; and I can conduct you to them at the proper time."

"Have I not told you," answered Will, "that I have been with them already?"

"Indeed!" said the prudent Chronicler, somewhat surprised, "that is extraordinary, since I am forbidden to attend them till after the hour

of compline. There is something very odd in this. Whither go you, then?"

William now found he had gone too far already, at least in his assertions; but there was no help for it; nothing, he now felt, but boldness and impudence could get him through. He therefore answered, without the least hesitation, "I am now going to fulfil their intentions."

"Indeed!" said John, still more surprised. "And what may they be? But before I speak farther upon this subject, give me some proof that you are one of the persons appointed to assist Sir Evan in his enterprise; for I have my doubts about you. What is to be the signal of your attendance?"

"A single blast upon Sir Evan's bugle," immediately answered the quick-witted, and daring page.

"It is all right then," said John; "and you are the person that I took you for. Well then, what is your business? for I am appointed to give you every assistance."

"I know you are," replied William; "go therefore instantly, and lose no time, and cause

the palfreys of the Lady Jane and Isabel to be sent round to the Prior's private garden gate. There let them be fastened by the reins and left till they are wanted; no one must wait except myself; for, look you, I have the keys in my charge. And do you then station *yourself without* the great gates of the monastery, till one hour after compline, to watch lest any one approach. You may not dare return hither, or move from that spot."

"Are such the Prior's orders?" inquired John, submissively; for the sight of the keys, and the knowledge of the signal, had confirmed him in the belief, that William was no other than one of the persons appointed to assist Sir Evan on this occasion.

"They are, they are," said the page; "his orders to the very letter, and he looks that they shall be instantly obeyed."

"I obey them, then," said John; "the palfreys shall be instantly sent round. I will look to the great gates, no one shall pass," and away went John, to the delight of Will of the West, who, highly applauding his own wit, both in

his invention, and in his excellence in the art of mumming, passed on to the church without farther interruption. He turned the key which gave him entrance, and hastening towards the shrine of the Virgin, disturbed the two lovely devotees, who were then performing their solitary penance before her image.

The tapers at the shrine burnt clear and bright. Will threw aside his hood. His well known face, and his person wrapped in such a guise, astonished both the ladies, and they trembled as he exclaimed, with a voice of peculiar emphasis, "Lose not a moment! for Heaven's sake follow me! you are betrayed! I have the means to save you!" A hasty explanation now followed. The fidelity of the page had been long too well tried to be doubted. The ladies Jane and Isabel wrapped their veils closely around them, and, without staying to finish their prayers, they followed William in all haste, who led the way into the Prior's garden.

The keys gave them easy access through both doors; and so quick had John the Chronicler been in obeying the Prior's supposed commands, that

the ladies' palfreys stood ready for them without the gate of the private garden. William gallantly assisted them in mounting into the saddle, and leaping himself upon the courser intended for Sir Evan de Foix, he demanded where he should conduct the fair damsels who had now committed themselves to his protection.

This was a point no one seemed prepared to settle; but all agreed, that certainly at this time they should not do well to return to Orthes. Isabel feared to return to a castle which Eustace had for ever abandoned. The Lady Jane feared the violence of Sir Evan de Foix more than the tyranny of the Count. And Will of the West feared hanging instead of whipping at the hands of the Prior after his late exploits. All therefore agreed to fly. And the Lady Jane saying she had a noble kinswoman at Tarbes, of whom she would solicit a present shelter for herself and her friends, the little party turned their horses' heads in that direction, and set off at full gallop through the woods.

CHAPTER III.

THE RENCONTRE.

There's nothing in this world can make me joy ;
Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale,
Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man.

SHAKESPEARE.

EUSTACE, as we have before mentioned, quitted the castle, after witnessing the supposed proof of Isabel's inconstancy, ere the sun had illumined the towers of Orthès, and the neighbouring hills and woods. Eustace left the spot where he had passed his life from infant years to the present time, with those feelings of deep and heartfelt melancholy that for a while overpower the elasticity of a youthful mind, and present to the imagination, in its view of future days, nothing but a vast and dreary desert, without one point of pleasing direction that the eye of hope may rest upon as a beacon of comfort and assurance.

For some time, negligently holding the reins,

he suffered his horse gently to pace on at its own pleasure; and the animal, which had long been accustomed to bear his rider into the woods of Orthes, in pursuit of the amusement of hawking (when the youthful party of the castle generally set out with a gentle pace) now took that direction; so that about the dawn of day Eustace found himself on the borders of the forest, near a little stream that brawled over rocks and pebbles through the wood, till it brought the treasure of its silver waters as a tribute to the river Gave.

This, perhaps, was the worst place in the whole neighbourhood that the unhappy young man could have visited at such a time; for it was on the banks of this beautiful little stream that Eustace had so often wandered with Isabel. Here, when children, they had roamed, perhaps chasing the light-winged and painted butterfly from bush to bush; or here they had gathered wild flowers, and sent them idly floating down the current of the stream; just as they of maturer years, in the sunshine of their days, often cast away upon the gliding current of time those blossoms of pure and innocent enjoyment, that

sprang up before their path, till they are lost within the vortex of a bustling and a giddy world.

Here also Eustace and Isabel had often wandered, at a more advanced age; sometimes following the brook upon its verge of green and velvet turf, or where its banks became abrupt and rocky, now overshadowed with the thick boughs of the sturdy oak, and now pent in between the crags of broken granite and moss-grown stones. They had frequently ascended through the uncertain footing of the path, as Eustace assisted Isabel to clear the difficulties of her way; whilst she, smiling, as if pleased with difficulties that rendered his assistance necessary, gave her hand to him, as he stood upon the summit of some little eminence, and, with a light and bounding step, nimble as the timid hare, she cleared the crag, and stood panting from exertion by his side.

“Alas!” thought Eustace, as these reminiscences of former times passed rapidly through his mind, “and were the hopes of all those delightful days indeed vain? Have I lived but on

a shadow? Shall these scenes be only remembered to awaken misery? Oh Isabel! I think I see you now, when, an innocent child, you wandered with me through the forest! would to Heaven we could have lived and died together here, unknown to the world and its corruptions—that world which has destroyed the open ingenuous character of thy nature, and, robbing thee of thy simpleness and truth, hath given in their stead the heartless and cold dissimulation of vanity and falsehood. It was here that Isabel, when a child, would call me by the affectionate name of brother; and it was here, that, in a few summers after, she first owned she loved me more than as a brother. There was no falsehood then. I loved, yet never flattered her: but the flattery of a court, like the serpent which stole into Paradise to beguile our first parent, shows but its gliding, gilded form, till it has wound and circled through a devious path, to vent the poison of its forked sting. Farewell, then, to thee, Isabel! and with thee, farewell to life! for what is it now to me!”

With such like melancholy reflections, still

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disclaiming the scene before him, yet still visiting every spot whose view presented some busy remembrance of former times, Eustace passed on; till he, at length, endeavoured to compose his mind, and now first seriously began to think in what direction he should bend his steps. He thought of Lourde, and immediately determined to fulfil the injunctions of the Franciscan; still he felt desirous that no one should trace his steps, at least no one to whom he was known: for men of feeling minds, when miserable from the wrongs they have sustained by another, desire to be alone. Injuries from those we love, when they touch the heart, seek not the solace of communication; whilst afflictions that come by the direct visitation of Providence, are prone to seek the fellowship of complaint as some relief to the burden of their sorrows.

Eustace therefore resolved to linger about the borders of the forest, till it should be near the evening hour, when he thought he could, without the chance of interruption, pass through the wood, and set forward on the direct road to Lourde. With this road he was, however, unacquainted;

for the fortress of Lourde, and the castle of the Lord of Armagnac, were situated near to each other; and the continual feuds which had subsisted between them and Orthes, had prevented any communication on the part of the town and castle of Orthes with either, save in matters for carrying on the warfare, or in parleying upon the terms of a truce.

Eustace therefore determined that he would refresh himself at some cottage on the borders of the forest, remain there a few hours, learn his way towards Lourde (which was some leagues distant), and then set forward. For this purpose he turned his horse's steps towards the habitation of a poor woman in the neighbourhood; yet why he should have selected her dwelling for the accomplishment of his intents, (as it was one of the most humble on the borders), it would be difficult to say; unless it may be, that some feeling, of which he was himself perhaps unconscious, prompted him to do so; for the poor woman had received much kindness at the hands of Isabel de Greilly; and Eustace had also done her a service, by begging the Count de Foix

to excuse her the payment of the hearth-tax on account of her poverty, and the children she had to rear up. He feared not to trust himself with this honest, simple creature, and quickening his horse's pace, he soon found himself without the enclosure that surrounded her little habitation.

The ground belonged to De Foix, and the cottage, which had been erected by the charity of Isabel, was romantically situated near the source of the stream we have before noticed, which, nigh this spot, burst from a rock, and tumbling over fragments of granite, eddied and dashed along with white flakes of foam through the narrow confines of its channel. Within the enclosure of the garden there was also a grotto, which, under the direction of Isabel, had been hewn and hollowed from the solid rock. This was a place of cool retreat, which the youthful party of the castle were in the habit of frequenting whilst pursuing the sport of hawking; and this grotto Isabel had delighted to decorate with the hand of taste. Upon reaching the garden Eustace dismounted, and tying up his horse to

the gate, he raised the latch, and entered its well-known precincts.

This was a place that presented a thousand objects before which the feelings of Eustace sickened with painful retrospection. He trembled as he looked around, like the aspen that quivers with every breath of wind. Each little object had a tongue that spoke to his heart: here was a tree under which Isabel used to sit. He passed on to the grotto: there stood her now empty seat—here were the plants she reared around the spot—and a hawking-glove, left carelessly when they were last here, still lay upon the rustic table; it still bore the form of her fingers, and of her hand, just as it had done when taken from the wearer; and there hung a lute, placed within a recess, depending from its silken string, just as Isabel's hand had placed it but a few days before. When the mind is deeply imbued with melancholy, the most trifling and inanimate things will jar upon its feelings, and call up bitter thoughts. So was it now with Eustace. He looked upon the lute, and

could not help exclaiming, "There it is, just the same—there it hangs, just as she placed it; but how has she changed me! I am not the same:" and borne along by the current of painful and irritating feelings that succeeded, Eustace hastily left the grotto, and bent his steps towards the house.

As he approached, he was astonished to find the door fastened against him; and it was not till he had repeatedly demanded admission, that he was at length let in. "Holy St. Ursula, and is it you!" exclaimed the woman, as she looked upon Eustace with a mixture of surprise and alarm.

"Why, who else should it be, my kind gossip?" said Eustace. "Why are you thus frightened, Margaret?"

"Frighted!" answered Margaret hastily, as she raised her hands and eyes: "heaven bless you, I have not rested in my bed this many a night for fear; and when I saw you going up the garden in your armour, I said, all the saints have mercy on me, for there they are, come again, as sure as ever I was born!"

“ And who did you think were come again, Margaret ?” inquired Eustace. “ No one comes here, I trust, to harm you.”

“ Harm me ! why no,” answered the woman, “ I can’t exactly say they did harm me, though they took from me some of the poor chickens I had reared for the market : but, St. Ursula bless you ! the fright of a sword does almost as much harm as the sword itself.”

Between terror and loquacity, it was some time ere Eustace understood that the poor woman had been affrighted, but the day before, by an extraordinary visit from some persons belonging to the Lord of Armagnac. It was bold and unusual that they should have ventured thus near to Orthes ; but the truce with De Foix was expired, and his opponents had thus early commenced their old acts of annoyance, surprise, and depredation. The forest, too, from its extent and intricacy, was peculiarly advantageous to an ambuscade or a skirmishing party.

Eustace prevailed with Margaret to compose herself, and then saying that for some particular

reasons, he desired it should not be known that he was at this time in the forest, he would pass a few hours in her cottage, and begged she would prepare him some refreshment whilst he looked to the present accommodation of his horse.

This was done; and whilst Eustace partook of his frugal repast, the good woman did her best to entertain him with her loquacity; and her two little children played around him, as they well knew their old companion in many a game at romps. One endeavoured to lift his sword, whilst the other handled his surcoat, and, with childish wonder, gazed upon and asked questions about the various pieces of his armour; for Eustace had never before visited the cottage thus accoutred in the complete arms of a knight, and it had only been at first, that by taking off his basinet he could convince the youngest child that he was Eustace, and therefore there was nothing to fear.

During the time Eustace had remained in the cottage, Margaret remarked the deep melancholy that appeared fixed in his countenance;

that he spoke little, and although he noticed the children, yet it was but slightly; just by a kiss and a pat of the head or two, but not with that kind and cheerful notice, that interest in their delightful trifles and their sports, which ever wins upon young minds. Then the joyous scream and hearty laugh of sportive childhood conveys the most perfect idea of gaiety and full enjoyment that can be found; then "how happy we are!" seems to speak from every limb and feature, as well as from the lips of infant mirth.

The worthy Margaret noticed this dejection, which was too apparent to escape even her observation; but not being very deeply versed in a knowledge of the human mind, she could fancy no cause for it, but such as must arise from some immediate object or impression. She feared the freedom of the children was disagreeable, or that the dinner was not dressed to her guest's liking: but all these conjectures being removed by the good-natured assurance of Eustace that he was well pleased both with her children and her fare, she was quite at a loss, and very sim-

ply remarked, "Why, what then, dear Sir Eustace, can make you so sad? You did not use to be so, when you came here with pretty young lady Isabel."

"Do not speak of her, I beg, Margaret," said Eustace, with considerable emotion.

"Not speak of my lady Isabel!" exclaimed Margaret; and she added, with a grave air, and shaking her head, "it must be poor doings indeed, when *you* bid me not speak of her. Why I remember when you would stand and let me talk about her for hours together; and to be sure she is the kindest lady, and the sweetest lady, with no pride about her, like most of your castle ladies, who seem to consider poor folks as if God made great and small only like hills and valleys, the one to look down upon the other. Dear heart! well, this is a strange world, when things do so alter that I must not speak of her."

"They do alter, indeed, Margaret," replied Eustace; "and the world is bad enough to drive from it any honest mind: every creature is corrupted by it."

"Bless us, holy St. Ursula!" said Margaret:

“ why I never heard you talk so before. You used to seem to like the world very well, and the people in it, too; and nothing shall ever make me believe my lady Isabel is not so good as she looks to be. But I am sorry to hear you talk thus; because, when people are unhappy, they always somehow find fault with the world, which, as God placed us in it, we ought not to condemn.”

There are some observations, which, however simple, are so true in themselves, they may defy sophistry; and thus it frequently happens that a plain understanding, having a proper knowledge of good and evil, will often more clearly see the path before it, and form a juster estimate of things, than a more refined intellect, which, from the very circumstance of its possessing superior powers, is often tempted, as an exercise of skill, to wander through the devious way of sophistry, till it is misguided and entangled by its own arguments and doubts.

Eustace felt the truth of dame Margaret's observations, and remained silent. Soon after this conversation he prepared for his departure, and

liberally rewarded the kindness and hospitality of the poor woman. As he was about to mount his horse, he turned towards her, and asked in a hesitating manner if she could point out to him the road to Lourde; "for," added he, "I know you once lived in that fortress, when Sir Peter Arnaut de Bearn was its governor."

"Ay did I, truly," answered Margaret; "I waited on the good lady De Bearn, before I married Jacques de Bois, and so left the castle. But what, in sooth, Sir Eustace, makes you seek such a place as Lourde? for people do say that since Sir Peter's death all things are altered there; that my lady, who used to be so gentle, is no better than a man soldier, never resting till she can work the ruin of the Count de Foix, in revenge for her lord's death. She has tried to worry him many a long year, but he has always been too much for her. And then Sir Peter's brother, John de Bearn, is so strange, that nobody knows if he be in the main most of a valiant captain or of an arch thief; and that Basil le Mengeant is cut-throat and robber to boot. Nay, I have heard, too, that they all quarrel

amongst themselves; and that, though to-day they fight for my Lord of Armagnac, and keep wassail in his halls, yet that to-morrow, perhaps, they care not if they rob him too. Wherefore, gentle youth, should you seek Lourde?"

"My purpose for seeking Lourde," answered Eustace, "has nothing to do with my inquiry as to the road which leads to it. Prithee tell me that; it is all I would learn from you."

"Why, then," said Margaret, "I can hardly tell you; for the forest is so intricate, and I so seldom have left my cottage since Jacques de Bois was either killed or lost; for I never saw him (St. Ursula rest his soul, if he be dead!) since he left me to go to speak about the money for some kine, that were carried off by one of those same governors of Lourde, that I hate the name of the place. All I can tell you is, that I know no road except to the market of Orthès, where I sell my chickens and get my little pickings to keep us alive; but you must keep on the right hand till you come to the great oak. You know the oak; it was struck by the lightning the night poor young Gaston de Foix died; and

every body said it was a sign a mighty head would be brought low; and so it was, and so they call it Gaston's oak to this day; and people say"——

"I know all they say, my good Margaret," replied Eustace; "but which way am I then to turn?"

"Why, then," continued the woman, "you know the monastery of St. Mary, don't you?"

"Yes, very well," answered Eustace.

"Why, then, you must not go near it, that's all," said Margaret; "but take the opposite road, and go on till you come to the ford over the Gave, and that is all I can tell you; and I dare say you will meet with somebody able to direct you. But there is one thing I would tell you," continued Margaret, as she put her hand on the arm of Eustace, and fixed an anxious eye upon him as she spoke, "it is to be wary: for there are many of my Lord of Armagnac's people spying and going hereabouts and thereabouts to see what they can find out or pick up; so be wary, and look that your horse is well saddled, and your arms all sound; for you may

need the speed of the one and the guard of the other before you think of it."

"Thanks for your caution, my kind gossip," said Eustace, "I will not neglect it; so farewell, and may all the saints guard you and your children."

Eustace departed, and obeying the directions of the poor cottager, he turned his horse into the path that led to the well-known oak tree. As he was contemplating its sturdy trunk and withered top, that stretched its bare and scathed arms above the scanty foliage which still mingled with the ivy that had twisted itself around those branches that hung from the centre of the tree, he thought he heard the paces of a horse advancing from a thick and intricate path of the wood behind him, and turning towards the spot, he observed something glitter, as it caught the rays of the sun through the small apertures that appeared between the trees.

"This," thought Eustace, "must be some armed man; I saw the light play upon his casque and targe;" and remembering the caution of

the gossip, he drew his sword and faced about. Scarcely had he done so when a warrior, completely armed from head to foot, and mounted upon a milk-white and beautiful courser, issued from the thicket. His visor was closed, but there was a dignity in the form and the carriage of the warrior that bespoke a man of high birth and usage. His arms and steed were fit for the service of a prince. Upon his shield appeared simply the device of the Virgin Mary on a field azure. He was unattended. "Strange," thought Eustace, "that such a knight should have no esquire, not even a page, to follow his steps. This is extraordinary ; for surely no knight of any degree, unless, indeed, he be a son of misfortune like myself, would thus wander through such a wood as this is, without some attendant or companion of his travel."

The strange knight, whoever he was, or whatever might be his purpose, seemed neither averse to company, nor to come upon any hostile intent ; as, notwithstanding Eustace stood with his sword drawn, he advanced towards him with-

out unsheathing a weapon, and saluting the young man with courtesy, he asked him whither he journeyed.

“Through the wood,” answered Eustace, “which I hope to pass ere dark; but why, sir knight, do you ask me the direction of my travel before you tell your own?”

“For no purpose,” replied the stranger, “but that I hoped to gain your company through the forest; I am about to pass it.”

Eustace, who felt no great inclination for the company of any one, would rather have declined this courtesy in the stranger; but he could not positively refuse an offer made in so amicable a manner, and by one who seemed to trust in his good faith. He therefore said, “It is true, noble knight, I purposed journeying alone; but as far as the forest lies, I will bear you company; for at its extremity, I think, we must part.”

“Perhaps not,” continued the stranger; “I have no particular object in my travel: I go to seek adventures as a knight errant; any road, therefore, is the same to me. I conclude by

your surcoat, and the housings of your horse, you are one of the house of De Foix."

"I am not allied to that house in blood," said Eustace, "although I bear the achievements of its lord, to whose service I am sworn."

"And on whose service you are now passing through these woods?" observed the stranger.

"No," answered Eustace; "I journey for my own pleasure. But were it otherwise, perhaps, it would be somewhat uncourteous in a stranger, however noble, to seek to learn my purpose."

"Doubtless it would," replied the knight adventurer, who seemed by no means disposed to understand this hint of reproof. "These are meddling and dangerous times, when it becomes every wise man to be wary of his companion, till he knows both him and in whose cause he wields the sword or lance."

"The remark is just," said Eustace, "and profiting by the instruction you have thus prudently given to me, pardon me, sir knight, and deem me not uncourteous, if I say, as a liege man to the Count de Foix, before we proceed farther on our journey, I must demand if I

travel with a friend or a foe. For it is not the custom of the times to pass on with a companion to whom one is unknown, and who wears his visor closed. It may case an honest brow, or one that but uses it to shroud the glance of treachery. Are you of the party of De Foix, or do you bear arms for the lord of Armagnac?"

"My conduct," replied the stranger, "may be the vouch for my trust; you have acknowledged yourself of fealty to De Foix; think you, therefore, if I were adverse to him, I should thus amicably pace my horse by the side of yours, when we are both armed and mounted, and when you met me with a naked weapon, which you still hold at advantage in your hand?"

"It is true," said Eustace; "and if you will not draw, I in courtesy must return my sword to its sheath; for I would not hold an unfair advantage over any man," and so saying he put up his weapon; "but still, sir knight, your answer is indirect: of whose party are you? tell me but that, and I shall be satisfied."

"I am of no party just now," replied the

stranger; “but, as I told you before, I am one of the honourable band of knights-errant who go about the world seeking adventures wherever they may find them, and to whom the castle-hall and the open forest offer alike in their turns the bed of repose. If I find wrongs, I redress them; I serve the unhappy, and rescue the distressed. If a damsel ask a boon, or an old wife beg a favour, your knight-adventurer may crave the kiss of the blooming fair, or the prayers of the ancient dame, as his guerdon; but still his vow binds him alike to the service of both. And, in truth, to speak plainly, there is something of the like adventure now brings me to these woods; for, as I learnt, there are some certain fair ladies who go on a pilgrimage to St. Ann’s from a monastery in this neighbourhood, and knowing how the ways are infested with the free companies, I purpose endeavouring to meet them, to guide them in safety to their destination. Now do you know my purpose; and if you have the inclination, you may assist me in the exploit.”

“In truth,” said Eustace, “I doubt not these damsels, whoever they may be, will find suf-

ficient protection in the valour of your single arm. And for my own part, I have not now the leisure to tarry on my road purely for a service of gallantry. For were there actual or-apparent danger, I hope I should do my devoir to any lady as a knight is sworn to do."

"You will not, then, tarry?" said the knight-adventurer; "then I fear we must part before we reach the borders of the forest; for my road lies towards the ford of the Gave; as every passenger, who goes either for St. Ann's or for Tarbes, must pass that ford, and there I go to beat up the game."

"Yet not to let fly a hawk to pounce on the heron?" replied Eustace, smiling at the expression his companion had used. "Your game, I trust, is of a nobler kind. Yet, as far as the ford lies I can bear you company, for I am bound in that direction; and perhaps then you would in courtesy teach me the way to Lourde."

"To Lourde!" exclaimed the knight, with astonishment. "And you a liege man of De Foix! Why, this is a maze of more intricacy than the paths of these woods are to unravel.

May I so far trespass on your courtesy, to crave to be informed if my Lord de Foix sends you thither?"

"I have before said," answered Eustace, "I journey on my own affairs."

"And do they lead you to Lourde?" said the stranger. "If you escape the fangs of the wolf, rely upon it you fall into the jaws of the lion, if you come within his grasp. De Foix pardons no one who holds intercourse with any of Lourde."

"I know that too," replied Eustace; "but perhaps it may be a long season ere my Lord de Foix and I meet again." An involuntary sigh burst from the bosom of Eustace as he uttered these words. The knight marked it, and the air of deep dejection that over-shadowed the brow of the youth.

"Forgive me," he said, addressing Eustace, "if I notice that you seem something melancholy when you name the Lord de Foix: are you still of his train?"

"I was of his train," answered Eustace.

"And, perhaps," said the inquisitive stranger, "you are now discarded?"

Eustace coloured and bent his brows, and said with a stern air, "You are something bold in your conjectures: it is no matter what I was or what I am, save to myself alone."

"And your name?" continued the stranger.

"Is my own," replied Eustace, still more sternly; "and not at the service of every bold tongue which may demand it."

"Nay," said the knight-adventurer, "I designed not to anger you by asking the question; I but thought to do you service. These are stirring times, and as you are discarded"——

"Who told you I was discarded?" hastily answered Eustace, as he raised his head, and turned an angry glance upon his companion. "Mark me, knight; either keep the bearing of courtesy whilst we journey on together, or leave me. If you will stay, yet be friend or foe, I can meet you on either score; but I brook not an insolent tongue, though it spoke from the lips of a prince."

"I am not a man," answered the stranger, with perfect composure, "either to give offence or to receive taunts. I will be friendly with you,

or I would meet you in the way of arms, only let me do it in my own way. I said but now, these are stirring times; and if a brave, spirited young man, such as you are, wanted employment, I could help him to a service, where every word of the tongue, every stroke of the sword that turned to the benefit of his lord, should find its recompense in bags of golden florins."

"And who is this lord you mean?" inquired Eustace.

"Nay," said the knight-adventurer, "that must not be told till I know if you are willing to serve such a one."

"No, never!" answered Eustace. "I serve no man unless I first know him to be honourable. I make no blind engagements where my eyes are hoodwinked till the pleasure of another takes off the bandage."

"He, of whom I speak, is honourable and noble too," answered his companion; "ay, and right gay and generous. In his halls there are no crabbed priests to scare the fairy goddess, Pleasure, with their dull lessons of morality, their death's heads, wax tapers, and their pe-

nances. No; there music wakes up the pulse of joy till it beats quick, and leads to the soft dalliance of lady-love, where beauty is kind as it is blooming; where all is love, without cold reserve, or prudish censure."

"And without modest bearing, I take it," said Eustace. "You have described better the licentious indulgence of an eastern haram, such as our crusaders used to tell of, than the sober love of a noble castle."

"Sober love!" cried the stranger, laughing. "Ha ha! sober love! Upon the faith of a soldier, which, I take it, lies in the readiest sword he can swear upon, you had better, young man, buckle on cowl and gown than your armour. Sober love! and you have not yet seen twenty summers over your head! Come, come, we are knights, we know each other; keep this sobriety for the father at the next confessional, it is out of place here."

"Indeed, sir knight-adventurer," answered Eustace, "I am serious. The wild flights of wanton dalliance deserve not the sacred name of love; which, being in itself a virtue, is worthy

the praise of sobriety, as a serious and a comely feeling."

"Admirably expounded!" exclaimed his gay companion. "Why, thou shouldst preach at the next Lent tide to the bare-footed and white sheeted wives, who do penance for some small neglect of their conjugal vows. Yet, with all your sanctity, I would not trust you with those black-eyed and blooming damsels I but now named."

"Nor would I trust myself," said Eustace. "I would rather secure my innocence by shunning temptation. And I much fear, if such are your light thoughts, you will hardly be a safe escort for the damsels you attend as a protector. They may escape the wolf to fall into the snare of the wily fox."

"Pshaw!" cried his companion, "a man may talk wildly and yet do his devoir. But to our subject. I am serious in my offer to you."

"And I in my refusal of it," answered Eustace.

"Can neither the hope of gold, pleasure, beauty, nor honour, tempt you?" said the stranger.

"Honour should stand first in the catalogue,"

replied Eustace; “and then the rest of the account might not be wrongly placed; but, as it is, you have made her but the last in the train of temptation; and I fear she but too justly skulks behind, as if ashamed of the company in which *you* have placed her.”

“I cannot tempt you, then,” said the stranger, “to accept a service for your own advantage?”

“No,” answered Eustace: “present advantage must not be bought at the charge of future ruin.”

Whilst this singular conversation was passing, the two knights had made a considerable progress through the wood. It was now drawing towards the close of day; the sun had already tinged with its golden rays the tops of the forest-trees, and darted long and red streaks of light through the openings of the wood, as it slowly sunk in the horizon. Eustace longed to be rid of his companion; for although he was but ignorant of the world, yet he had penetration sufficient to observe the stranger was endeavouring to work upon his youthful imagination, to engage him in some service, where he might be

lured by pleasure, to become perhaps a useful, but not an honourable, instrument. Or why thus address him, and for what purpose? Eustace could not help believing that he had unwittingly betrayed himself into a confession of having quitted the service of De Foix; the knight-adventurer might upon that account wish to secure him, in order to gain intelligence of the Count's plans. Yet, again, why should he do this, if the stranger was really not adverse to De Foix? He was lost in conjecture. And, after all, there was such a light-hearted, careless manner about his companion, who was now jesting upon the most serious subjects, now singing the snatch of a minstrel's song, again asking bold questions, and anon talking of arms, that Eustace was almost inclined to think his words might be more than his purpose; like the ebullition of a shallow stream, which makes a greater noise than deep and smooth waters. Still the stranger wore his visor closed, and never seemed so wholly off his guard as to utter one word that could betray himself. Eustace, therefore, after all his cogita-

tions, concluded with the opinion, that he could not tell what to make of him, and should not be sorry to part with him at the ford.

It was now the dusk of evening, and night's shadows were fast closing round. They drew near the ford of the Gave; its banks were thickly set with trees, and two rough roads met together near this spot, each of which led to a separate part of the forest. As Eustace and his companion advanced, a shrill cry of distress suddenly struck upon their ear, which was soon followed by continued shrieks of terror, and exclamations for mercy, mingled with the trampling of horses, and threats of violence. "Holy Mary!" exclaimed Eustace, "that was the cry of women!" He instantly drew his sword, and turning to his companion, said, "Now, sir knight-adventurer, prove yourself the rescue of the distressed;" and without staying farther parley, Eustace dashed his spurs into his courser's sides, and rushed on towards the ford, as the cries had issued from that quarter.

The knight-adventurer immediately drew his

sword, but followed Eustace at a much slower pace, whilst that gallant youth perceived through the dusk of twilight, two female forms, and the figure of a boy. They seemed to be making an ineffectual resistance against some ruffians, who had stopped their horses, and were dragging the riders from their saddles. Eustace with one blow struck the foremost ruffian, who held the horse's head of one of the females, to the ground; he was proceeding to grapple with a second, who with a drawn dagger was advancing towards him, whilst two others seemed to meditate joining their comrade to overpower the gallant opponent by numbers rather than courage.

One ruffian had already seized the bridle of his horse, when the knight adventurer at that moment coming up, Eustace called out to him, "Help me, aid me, or I may not save them! they are helpless women, strike down yon villain!" Eustace raised his arm to hurl a powerful blow at the ruffian who had struggled in his grasp, when suddenly a second villain coming behind him struck the sword from his hand, and

at the same moment attempted to stab him in the back; but the armour was proof, of Milan tempered steel, and resisted in some measure the blow of the assassin; the wound, therefore, was not deep enough to cause death. Eustace immediately drew his dagger, and turned upon the wretch who had thus cowardly assaulted him; but ere he could execute the purpose of his just indignation, the knight adventurer (who had not used one exertion in the fray) suddenly raised his visor, and snatching up the bugle that hung at his breast, he blew a shrill blast, that sent its long echo through the woods.

The sound was almost instantly succeeded by the trampling of horses, as if some persons, who had hitherto been in ambush, were advancing. They appeared. Eustace had continued to grapple with the powerful ruffian who had assaulted him, and was about raising his right arm to plunge the dagger in the coward's breast, whilst he grasped him by the throat with the other, when at this moment the knight adventurer exclaimed aloud, "Our Lady for Armagnac!" The

cry was answered by the advancing horsemen, "D'Albreth to the rescue!" and as they dashed forward, again the knight-adventurer called aloud, "Our Lady for Armagnac!" As he said these words, he suddenly rushed upon the unsuspecting Eustace, and hurled him from his horse to the ground. "Treacherous villain!" exclaimed the fallen youth, "is this thy faith, thy rescue?"

"Credulous fool," answered the adventurer, with a scornful laugh, "thinkest thou that Armagnac would watch like a sparrow-hawk to catch jays, and lure lady-birds in a wood, if he had not a net ready to secure them. Here, D'Albreth, away with them; and you, Le Mengeant, bind that champion of damsels securely, and place him on his horse; guard the women, and see that the boy finds not the use of his feet, to help the prating of a saucy tongue. Then carry them all as prisoners to the castle. I will soon be there to meet them."

Such were the orders of the treacherous Lord of Armagnac. They were instantly obeyed; and

Eustace, faint and wounded, with the unhappy ladies, Jane and Isabel, and Will of the West, were secured, and immediately conveyed under a strong guard of men at arms, to the castle of this treacherous and abandoned knight,

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONFERENCE.

Othello. Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell !
Yield up, O love, thy crown, and hearted throne,
To tyrannous hate ! swell, bosom, with thy fraught,
For 'tis of aspicks' tongues !

Iago. Pray, be content.

Othello. O, blood, Iago, blood !

SHAKSPEARE.

IN order that our readers may fully comprehend the circumstances which led to the capture of Eustace, the ladies, and the page, by a means so extraordinary as that detailed in the last chapter, it becomes necessary we should here speak of the character and plans of the Lord of Armagnac, the ancient enemy of De Foix.

It already has been noticed, that the feuds subsisting between these noblemen had commenced with their ancestors, and had been handed down from father to son, almost as a part of their inheritance. The present Lord of

Armagnac was, at the period of our narrative, about the middle age; but, possessing an uncommonly handsome person, and a gay air, he looked considerably younger than he really was. He had married early in life, yet proved so bad a husband, that his wife passed months together within the retirement of a cloister, where, under pretext of holy penances, she was glad to escape the cruelty and tyranny of her lord, who had wedded her but to possess her wealth, and did not afterwards use towards her even the common decencies of outward observance or respect, as his castle halls were filled with the licentious and abandoned of all descriptions.

The Lord of Armagnac had neither the religion, nor even the superstition of the times; and if ever he spoke of an hereafter, it was only to mock at the terrors with which the priests described it as invested for the portion of the guilty. Towards De Foix he cherished a personal as well as hereditary hatred, the Count having in early life successfully rivalled him in gaining the hand of the sister of the King of Navarre, the first object of his choice. In minds devoid

of generosity, no passion rankles with greater bitterness than that excited by the envy of unsuccessful rivalry. Armagnac could never pardon De Foix.

The care of the immense wealth of Jane of Boulogne, being in some measure vested within the power of her uncle, the Lord of Armagnac, he had been tempted to employ that power to seize upon a considerable part of it (particularly the lands of Comminges which she claimed in right of her late mother as sole heiress) for his own use; and he had maintained possession till the present time, when the Count de Foix had resolutely asserted his determination to regain it by the way of arms for the Lady Jane; who, it will be remembered, when a child, had been placed in his wardship for the security of her person against the repeated attempts of her cruel uncle. This, therefore, was an additional cause of hatred between these feudal lords; and the avarice of Armagnac now made him resolve to employ every means to overturn the Count's well-concerted plans, and to maintain his own usurpation.

There was in this man's disposition a mixture of avarice and prodigality; vices, however opposite, often found united in the profligate and the spendthrift. Profuse, and careless even to excess, in whatever contributed to his pleasures and dissipation, the Lord of Armagnac was yet niggardly in any charge of honest dealing, or in such as formed the necessities of an ordinary nature: he would gain wealth by any base, disgraceful, or violent means; he would keep it, if possible, from being expended upon any honourable or useful purpose; but he hesitated not to squander it upon thoughtless pleasures and dark stratagems. Gay in his disposition, but cold in heart, he felt for no one, not even for himself: could the Lord of Armagnac have been told he was to die on the morrow, he would but have sought to make the intermediate time pass the more gaily off.

There was one peculiarity in his disposition, which rendered him more dangerous than such an open profligate seemed likely to be to those of honest minds. This arose from his love of stratagem and intrigue, which might be said to

have been born with him. Even pleasure itself was enhanced to Armagnac, if it were procured by some indirect means, and intricate manoeuvre. Was a castle to be taken, or a damsel to be won, he would rather gain the former by a surprise, at the postern door, than by an attack at the great gates. And the damsel of his lawless love would scarcely satisfy his passion, unless she were obtained after difficulty and resistance. This habit of indirect dealing accompanied the Lord of Armagnac, even in his cruelties. It was not often he took away life, till he was certain he could make no advantageous intrigue by showing mercy. And it was a common exercise of his talents to lay traps to ensnare noble knights, merely to obtain a large ransom for their freedom.

Persons who are possessed of this spirit of intrigue, are peculiarly fond of gaining intelligence respecting the conduct of others by the means of dependents, gossips, and tale-bearers of every description. Such persons were sure of the countenance of Armagnac, who delighted in the whisper that destroyed reputation.

There was a striking difference between the characters of the Count de Foix and his opponent, however they might resemble each other in actual tyranny. De Foix was a tyrant only to answer some object of his policy or of his ambition : Armagnac from the mere love of tyranny. The Count was liberal : his rival prodigal. De Foix had imbrued his hands in blood at the instigation of passion : Armagnac from deliberate malice and wantonness. De Foix, held inviolate a promise : Armagnac scrupled not to break an oath. Having said thus much of his character, we shall now proceed to speak the manner in which he possessed himself of the persons of his unfortunate prisoners.

The manner of feudal warfare helped to give to the middle ages that peculiar character of Romance, which distinguishes them from all other periods of history. Stratagems, disguises, surprisals, the carrying off knights and damsels into captivity, were really the common and usual events of the time ; with whose extraordinary particulars the pages of many of our chroniclers, and especially those of Froissart,

are filled. These pourtray events of so romantic a nature, that it is only by possessing a knowledge of the character of the times, we can, in our days of personal security, believe such things were true.

Feudal warfare being often rendered successful by stratagem and intrigue, it became a thing of import to find out the plans and movements of an enemy. For this purpose one baron often placed a creature of his own, as a spy, within the castle of another, and generally found his account in so doing, however disgraceful the practice.

The Lord of Armagnac, who loved intrigues of every kind, had carried this practice to a great extent; squires, pages, and even women were in his pay; so that there was scarcely a castle in the neighbourhood but harboured one of his creatures; and the large rewards they received for their intelligence was the best security of their fidelity. One of these instruments he had contrived to fix near the person of De Foix; and it was by means of this communication that the lord of Armagnac learned the purposed visit of

the ladies Jane and Isabel as pilgrims to the shrine of St. Ann. This was an opportunity not to be neglected. Jane once within his power, he could laugh at all the efforts of De Foix. He might spare her life, or he might get rid of her, as should best serve his occasion; and Isabel de Greilly, from her youth and beauty, was scarcely a less desirable prize.

It might be supposed that possessed of such intelligence, the lord of Armagnac would have simply sallied forth with a body of men at arms, to intercept the passage, and seize upon the persons of the ladies. But such a plain measure was by no means sufficient to gratify his love of stratagem and intrigue. Le Mengeant was therefore instructed to take with him a chosen few to make the ladies Jane and Isabel prisoners at the ford of the Gave, whilst Armagnac alone would linger near the spot (secured from personal danger by the Lord D'Albreth being stationed in readiness with an ambuscade in the wood) and endeavour to pick up any stray knight who would, by such means, fall into the trap of the ambuscade, and might afterwards be forced to

pay a large ransom for his liberty; a trick the intriguing lord had often successfully practised. And in case of any resistance, should the ladies be better guarded than was expected, the ambuscade would be ready to sally forth to the rescue on the slightest signal.

The reader is already aware how far this plan succeeded, and that the unfortunate Eustace fell into the snare thus artfully contrived by the intriguing spirit of Armagnac. Yet it should seem that the offers he previously made to him (upon finding he had quitted the service of De Foix) were sincere; and that Armagnac hoped the allurements of promised pleasures and rewards, might tempt Eustace to betray his knowledge of the measures of De Foix to the enemy of the Count.

Upon the evening after that day on which the Lord of Armagnac had so captured the persons before-mentioned, within an apartment of his castle, was seated a lady dressed in deep mourning. She was past the middle age, but still retained the traces of former beauty. Her stature was tall. Her form dignified and well-

proportioned. The general cast of her countenance was that of deep melancholy; but an uncommon expression of intellect and fire occasionally flashed from her eyes; such an eye as made the observer shrink before its scrutiny. The lady was seated at a table, and seemed busied in preparing, from herbs and drugs, some medicine for the sick; an office of charity that was frequently performed by ladies during the time of which we are treating; when females deemed a knowledge of the healing art a necessary accomplishment in education.

Whilst the lady was thus engaged, the door of the apartment opened, and the Lord of Armagnac entered with an air of more respect than he was apt to use towards most persons. He then inquired, in a manner that implied some degree of deference, "How does your patient, Lady Matilda? Is there danger, think you?"

"Not as I think, at present, my lord," replied the lady, with an openness of speech unknown to most of the modern practitioners of the healing art; "his wound is not dangerous in itself; but his mind appears so irritated and destroyed, that

unless something can be done to calm that, I should fear fever might be produced, and then there certainly would be danger."

"But he must not die," answered Armagnac; "for I have need of him: he has but lately left the service of De Foix; we may gain much intelligence from him. Have you learnt his name?"

"No," said the lady, "he seemed unwilling to make it known; and I would not take advantage of the little care I paid to him, by pressing the discovery. I know not who he is."

"Nor do I either," replied Armagnac; "for the women and the page seem leagued in obstinacy. I cannot make the one betray the other. They are all securely lodged, however, within the eastern tower of this castle. You, lady, have alone permission of access to them: and from you I expect a better account of the youth. If we cannot make him speak, we will try how he can suffer; and should it come to the worst, and no one will pay a ransom for him, the loss of his life will but serve to keep the headsmen's axe in practice."

"You will not, I trust," said the lady, "exe-

cute your threat: the youth seems unhappy and harmless; you will do well to spare him."

"Shall I do well to spare him, Lady Matilda?" replied Armagnac, with a marked expression of irony: "What! to spare the creature of my Lord de Foix, who may return to him, and aid him to disconcert all our plans; would *that* be your pleasure?"

"If your plans," said the lady, "were only aimed against the Lord de Foix, I would freely venture my own life to give them success; but I would not sacrifice innocent blood to fulfil even my desire of vengeance."

"You grow cold, lady," answered Armagnac; "is this then to be the end of all our alliances; our mutual designs of vengeance? But, perhaps, as you are a woman, kind and tender hearted," continued Armagnac, with a sarcastic smile, "you may have pardoned the Count de Foix."

"What!" exclaimed Lady Matilda, as she arose from her seat; and with an expression of almost frantic energy, glanced her eye upon the proud lord; "*I pardon him! I forgive De Foix!*"

whilst the earth holds such a wretched outcast as *I* am ! Whilst the blood of my murdered husband, spilt by De Foix's accursed hand, still looks fresh upon his dagger, for want of vengeance to wash it out ! No ! I have not a hope in life but my revenge ! Revenge has formed the thoughts of my day, the dreams of my night ! It has sustained me through misery and suffering ! I have hoped for it ; toiled for it ; I have prayed for it ; ay, and I have sinned for it ! And think you that I now would give it up ? No ! Because the lioness sleeps, has her strength failed her ? She awakes refreshed, yet hungered from repose, to make the woods ring with her yells, ere she springs to seize upon her victim."

"If such are your sentiments, then wherefore hesitate ?" said Armagnac : "Why will you thus hang back, when we want all your aid to make our vengeance sure ? Where is John de Bearn ? he is our sworn ally. Where are the men at arms he promised should assist us ? He is cold in our cause, and slow in execution. Why does he not appear ?"

“Your cause has lost its character of vengeance,” answered the Lady Matilda, “since you have debased it by making it the instrument to gratify your injustice against an innocent woman. You now make war upon the Count, only to maintain those lands you have usurped from Jane of Boulogne, your unhappy niece. The blood of De Bearn is too noble to aid the cause of tyranny.”

“Then, fair lady,” said Armagnac, with his accustomed light manner, “let the blood of De Bearn do itself right, and seek its own noble vengeance ; for I fancy, without the assistance of the Lord of Armagnac, it would be like to place its achievement as high as the hangman could exalt it ; which would be the utmost summit the noble blood of revenge might enable the De Bearn to attain.”

“I know your power,” replied Matilda ; “else had I never been your ally ; but we stood once on other terms. My power, and that of John de Bearn’s united, once saved you from destruction, else had this castle fallen to crush you with its

walls. You have forgotten when we obliged De Foix to raise the siege he laid before it."

"No, I have not," said Armagnac, with a careless air, "my memory is something too good; but I fancy if the Count de Foix had not been your mortal enemy, as well as mine, the castle might have fallen about my ears ere you came to prop it up with the stout men of Lourde; and the head you then preserved upon my shoulders still sits there to thank you."

"You had better thank me," replied Lady Matilda, "with acts than by words. Your present cause of quarrel is a disgrace to mine; and serves not the interests of a just revenge."

"But it serves the interests of my treasury, fair lady," said Armagnac; "and that is quite as important to me as your stores of vengeance are to you; and I think Jane of Boulogne being in my power, is like to turn the balance in favour of my account."

"Of infamy!" answered Matilda; "you have made her a prisoner by most unfair means."

"But she is my prisoner," said Armagnac;

“and I never yet knew a captive, who much liked the turn of the game that gave him into captivity, or that thought it quite fair. In short, it is something like a game of chess, when the loser admits he is beaten; but that he is so, only by a false move, an oversight, or some mistake with respect to the pieces: still the game is the game, however won.”

“And will you not then restore the unhappy Jane to her freedom?” inquired the Lady Matilda.

“Restore her to freedom!” said Armagnac; “no, no, Lady Matilda; not just at present, whatever I may think to do hereafter. You have my leave to comfort and console her in the hours of her captivity within this castle; but there it ends: for I think, lady, even your desire of vengeance could not break through stone walls and iron bars, whilst I keep the keys of these towers and castle.”

“And why am I too,” inquired Matilda, proudly, “why am I held your prisoner? I am your ally, not your captive! You have no right

to confine me within the walls of these apartments !”

“ Nor will I do so,” said Armagnac ; “ you have the free range of every apartment within this castle, save that which leads to the portal. I have much respect for *your* good faith ; but in sooth, dear lady, till your brother John de Bearn appears with those promised men at arms to assist our cause, we cannot part with you, whom we hold as an honourable hostage for his faith and plighted word.”

“ And was it for this,” said Lady Matilda, indignantly, “ was it for this, you lured me to your castle by a pretext of consulting upon the terms for carrying on the war against the Count de Foix ?”

“ No pretext at all, lady,” answered Armagnac, “ only a little manœuvre ; and we now understand the terms on which John de Bearn must bring up those forces to our aid. Half the men of Lourde are under his controul ; I am sure of Le Mengeant’s party. These are our terms for carrying on the war ; and till they are fulfilled,

you remain our honoured guest ; if you like that term better than hostage."

The Lady Matilda darted a fierce glance upon the bold and careless countenance of the Lord of Armagnac, and said with a voice of uncommon emotion : " You *swore* to aid me in the work of vengeance."

" Ay," replied Armagnac, " but it was to aid you in my own way. I am thinking of a stratagem that may help you ; but if you so much love vengeance, lady, I think we could contrive to disguise you as a pilgrim, or a minstrel, furnish you with a poniard, and get you into the castle of Orthes, where you might gratify your desires by stabbing the Count de Foix to the heart."

" And think you *that* would satisfy my just revenge?" exclaimed Matilda. " No ! If the blood of De Foix alone had been sufficient, this hand long since had done the deed. I would work a greater punishment than death ! The ruin of his power, the extinction of his earldom, are but the commencement of those sorrows I would have him suffer, as some requital of my wrongs. I would see him without

hope; driven from his own dominions; wandering as a beggar, with his wretched children amongst his ruined people; whilst he looks upon the walls of his proud castle as they lay wasted and devoured by the flames. Then, amid the extinction of his race, I would see him die in misery and want; cursed by this world, and despairing of another. This, this is the only sacrifice worthy of being offered upon the altar I have reared to vengeance."

Whilst Lady Matilda spoke these words, she stood, as it were, exalted by her own energies, like a creature more than human. She seemed unconscious of every thing around her, and to breathe only the air, as if to inspire the courage and resolution necessary to do those acts, before which the spirit of an ordinary woman would tremble. Her voice was naturally deep and harmonious, but at this moment it sounded terrific and appalling; a glance of wild energy flashed from her expressive eye; and, folding her hands together, she exclaimed, "I am widowed and alone; but the spirit of revenge shall nerve my arms and fill my heart, till the murderer shall

have fully paid the utmost penalty due to his crime! and then, De Bearn, I can have scope to weep for thee! These eyes—that shall not shed a tear which might awaken the feelings of a woman, and yield my mind to weakness—these eyes shall then weep for thee till they are closed for ever!”

Lady Matilda ceased speaking, and, endeavouring to compose her mind, she seemed desirous to attempt subduing the outward expression of her feelings. She was indeed an object of pity, naturally of a high-minded and noble spirit. It would be unfair to judge her by the standard of female excellence in the present age; even her virtues partook of the strong and marked character of the times in which she lived. Her love for the murdered Sir Peter de Bearn had been enthusiastic; her desire to revenge his death was fierce and unmitigable: her conduct, at times, might be tinctured with frenzy, but it was distinguished by firmness and courage: her character might deserve reprehension, but it never could excite contempt.

Even the Lord of Armagnac, bold, light-minded,

and unfeeling as he was, in despite of his very self, treated her with more outward respect than he was accustomed to pay to any other person. He could not tell why, but he never felt so much at his ease, so bold in her company; he did not show his worst deeds to her; he would gloss them over; and he shunned the scrutiny of her eye without knowing wherefore: such is the involuntary ascendancy of a truly great and superior mind upon the conduct even of the most impudent and abandoned persons. The Lord of Armagnac wished to be rid of the restraint he now felt in the presence of the Lady Matilda; and proposing to her that she should again visit the wounded youth, he opened the door, and respectfully bowed as she retired from the chamber.

When the Lord of Armagnac felt desirous to rid himself of the presence of Lady Matilda, there might have been another motive, perhaps, besides that of restraint in her company, which prompted the wish to do so; for no sooner was she gone, than he advanced towards an obscure part of the chamber, and lifting up the arras

(with which almost all chambers at this period were hung) he unlocked a private door, that gave access to a small ante-room, leading to a dark passage, where any one might pass in and out whom he was desirous to receive without publicity: and the intriguing spirit of Armagnac prevented the key of this chamber from ever rusting for want of use. As the lord of the castle unlocked this door, he exclaimed, in a tone of voice between that of familiarity and command, “What, ho! Le Mengeant! Come forth, Basil!”

At these words there issued from the dark ante-room a man of uncommon stature, partially armed, and wrapped in a mantle of scarlet cloth, with a hood of the same material about his head. This man was no other than the celebrated captain, robber, and cut-throat, Basil le Mengeant; or, as he was sometimes called, Le Mengeant St. Basil de Lourde; the stories of many of whose deeds of cunning villany and daring outrage have been handed down to posterity.

Le Mengeant sallied from the dark ante-room like a beast of prey, who rises from his den after

sleep, and who turns about, shakes his shaggy hide, and glares around with his red eyes, to see if aught lurks near his place of rest; so looked Le Mengeant. He had probably been sleeping in his lurking-place whilst the preceding conference with the lady had been going on: for he now stared stupidly around, and yawning, without ceremony threw his huge limbs upon the seat that had lately supported the dignified figure of the Lady Matilda.

The person of Le Mengeant was familiar to Armagnac: but whether it was from contrast with the late occupier of the seat, or that the lamp which hung suspended from the roof, and darted its beams full on the countenance of the robber, producing that effect of strong light and shadow, such as we see in the pictures of Rembrandt, exhibited in a striking manner the air of ferocity that sat upon his features; whether it were from these causes or not, certain it is, Armagnac could not help remarking the figure before him as more than ordinarily terrific, and that Basil resembled nothing less than the arch-fiend himself. This famous robber was consi-

derably more than six feet in height; his limbs were formed in a well-proportioned gigantic mould; yet there was little flesh about him; he was all sinew and muscle. His immense hand, which he threw upon the table as he sat down, looked fit to wield the club of Hercules; his feet were equally large, in their proportion; his air was ungainly; and he strode rather than walked as other men: his head was broad and flat towards the top of the skull; his features were not ill-formed, excepting that the forehead was something too low, with projecting brows, that hung like a pent-house over two small round eyes of jet black, that glimmered like lighted coals in the midst of darkness: his hair was straight, black, and lank; and his mouth, completely enveloped in a thick bushy beard, could only be distinguished (set with a row of white teeth) when some occasion of rare note excited a laugh or a grin, which, contrasted with the habitual savage air of his general aspect, seemed to express not a passion of mirth, but of malice—an impulse too horrible to be earthly: and that swarthy complexion, so common to the moun-

taineers of Gascony, was, in Le Mengeant, rendered yet of a deeper tinge, by constant exposure to the heats of the country through which he led his marauding band of free companies.

Le Mengeant took his seat in evident ill humour, and said surlily to the Lord of Armagnac, "Why, why do you pen me up in yonder dark cabin to wait your pleasure? why am not I at once admitted."

"Impossible!" replied the lord; "impossible, Le Mengeant. I have the bravest stratagem for you that was conceived in the brain of man."

"And brought forth by an ass," replied the robber, very unceremoniously. "A plague upon your stratagems, they have nearly cost me life and limb. You told me last night, when I went adventuring upon your stratagems, that the women would be alone and unguarded, save by monks; so I need not put on my armour to deal with such cattle; when, look you, there comes up a boy, a very baby, scarcely out of leading-strings, whom I could have crushed, but for his snail's house on his back, and he, forsooth, aims his dagger at my throat; I dealt him a round

blow, though, in the back for it ; but a curse on your Milan proof, it is the armour of your gentleman that spoils an honest man's trade. I would have held him on my poniard, like a lark upon a spit, but for that."

" But, Le Mengeant," said the Lord of Armagnac, who seemed very desirous to conciliate the robber, " the stratagem was good ; but who expected to meet such a firebrand in that same boy, who looks scarcely old enough to run at a quintain ; who, I say, my dear Le Mengeant—"

" Pshaw !" exclaimed the robber, " leave your honey words, and proceed to business ; for what have you sent for me hither, through yonder chink in your walls ? Speak quickly, or I am gone. Whilst I have been following, like a hound at fault, the scent of your stratagems, the true game has slipped me : my own men, excepting the few now with me, have taken flight, and gone after a foray in Carcasonne ; so I must away to whip them back again, or the blood once in scent, the dogs will keep chase. Be quick, then, I have no time to lose."

" I will, Le Mengeant," answered Armagnac ;

“ but first taste a cup of wine—men debate not well on any matters with a dry throat.” The robber looked still sulky and displeased from his last night’s adventure with Eustace; but as he neither deigned to accept nor refuse the wine, the Lord of Armagnac thought it not beneath his dignity to wait upon Le Mengeant himself, and, with a busy officiousness, played the part of cup-bearer, endeavouring by every possible means to soothe his anger: just as when one attempts to conciliate a fierce and savage dog, the animal, though he suppress the open-mouthed, full bark, will eye his opponent, and growl, and look ready to start upon him, yet as if undetermined whether to do so or not. So seemed Le Mengeant, who drank a cup or two, and then grumbled and muttered some complaint between his teeth, which was answered by the Lord of Armagnac with, “ Le Mengeant, I pledge you. Another cup of wine—just taste this clary.”

Yet at length, after some obstinacy and wincing on the part of the robber, Armagnac gained the day. He was once more master over

Le Mengeant. This doubtless arose more from the submission of habit than from an acknowledged superiority of strength; for Basil could as easily have crushed the gossamer lord before him, as a bear could crush in the gripe of his hug the leader who drags him by a chain, and rules him with a stick: yet the bear, however strong, follows the man as his master; for both men and beasts are alike the creatures of habit, and succumb to the admitted, rather than the actual power of another. "Tell me, then," said Basil, "what is to be done?"

"I will," answered the lord. "Jane of Boulogne must not live. Yet I cannot very well venture to get rid of her *here*. I have some about me, useful knights, too, who, should the least suspicion of such a deed be but whispered by the wind, would instantly desert my cause. You, therefore, Basil, must take this little affair upon yourself."

Le Mengeant spoke not in reply; but, with a voice of perfect indifference, bid the Lord of Armagnac go on. "Well, then," he continued, "you shall hear my plan. I have told

her, that, for the present, till I can come into some terms of accommodation with the Count de Foix, in whose wardship she is placed, I would wish her to remain under the shelter of a holy roof, in a convent of the Pyrenees; and that a noble captain, a friend of mine, should conduct her thither, and set forth to begin the journey at the dawn of day. She shuddered when I named the Pyrenees, and seemed to guess my plan; for she exclaimed, ‘Is the convent near Lourde?’ But resistance was vain; and so she consented, just with such a look as that with which a criminal consents to mount the scaffold, when he knows he cannot help it.”

“And what do you with the other woman?” inquired Le Mengeant.

“What, with Isabel de Greilly?” said Armagnac. “Oh, I have a fine stratagem, in which her presence will be useful. You know my nephew D’Albreth. The rogue says he is in love with her, and has the audacity to demand her of me, for a wife, too, forsooth! as a requital or payment of his services that are to come. Now, mark my stratagem. I promise her to

him, and by that means obtain his services; for he has been wavering about them. In the meantime, I keep the lady Isabel in all honour; but when the war is over, and I no longer need his service, I then shall appropriate the damsel to myself; for I also am exceedingly in love with her, my most worthy Le Mengeant." There was something so ridiculous in talking to Basil about love, that the Lord of Armagnac could scarcely forbear laughing as he spoke; for as well might the ears of a dancing bear be regaled with the harmony of a fine tune, to accompany his hind-leg evolutions, instead of the continued beat of a stick upon a cracked drum; as well might those evolutions of uncouth and rugged motion be made to resemble the movements of gracefulness, as Basil could be capable of feeling or comprehending one idea of love. Le Mengeant only stared and grinned upon the Lord of Armagnac, and bid him finish about Jane of Boulogne.

"Why, then," said he, "my stratagem runs thus:—You shall not take her into the castle of Lourde; for John de Bearn is too great a fool to

twist the neck either of a woman or of a chicken ; but you know the pass that leads up to the castle through the Pyrenees—it is terrific—La Garde, I think you call the pass, Le Mengeant. As you lead her up, then—for it will be safer, you know, to trust to your own feet than those of the horse's—if she should happen to go too near the edge of the precipice, if her foot should slip, and she fall down the rock, why 'tis a sad accident, but no fault of thine, Le Mengeant."

Le Mengeant grinned again. "Speak out!" he exclaimed. "You would have me hurl her down the gap, that the eagles may pick the carcass, so that it tells no tales. It shall be done ; but first, the price. I do no business without a bargain."

"Most just," said Armagnac ; "certainly, most just. Why, then, Le Mengeant, if you could contrive somehow to steal that precious diamond I saw glitter upon her arm, it ought to be reward enough ; but, to be liberal with you, my worthy Le Mengeant, I am quite willing to add one hundred florins to the bargain."

"A hundred florins !" exclaimed the robber,

rising indignantly, as he advanced towards the door: "cut throats for yourself, my Lord of Armagnac; I have done with you. Why, I would not wring the neck of the page for such a sum!"

The Lord of Armagnac again began cajoling and soothing Le Mengeant, in the hope to abate his exorbitant demands; but they could not agree upon the terms: for as Armagnac stretched his avarice to let slip every additional ten florins, Basil rose in his demands. At length they both lost their temper, and the quarrel became so serious, that it gave Jane of Boulogne a chance for present escape. "I tell you," said Le Mengeant, "that I will have a florin for every foot of the precipice down which she falls, and I think there be at least the measure of five hundred of them, from the pass to the bottom."

"A florin for every foot of it!" exclaimed Armagnac: "an unheard of demand! why thou blood-hound, blood-sucker, wolf, or devil, would you make me gorge you with gold? Would you have me cut the throats of all my people to supply such extortion? Shall I set an example that every lord, who deals in the like traffic,

shall hereafter have reason to curse me, as the easy fool who could make a compliance with extortion a precedent. No, I will give you two hundred florins, but not a cross more, if it were to hurl down fifty Janes of Boulogne. I'll deal as a gentleman with an honest trader, and not as a craven with a hedge robber."

Le Mengeant looked somewhat confounded at the resolute manner in which this determination was expressed: he had no mind to lose the business of so good a customer, and, lowering his tone, he said, "Come, come, be generous, add fifty more florins to the two hundred, and our bargain is made. And I will throw into the scale some important intelligence, without asking a franc in addition."

"Indeed!" replied Armagnac: "well, then, take the other fifty, and let me have the intelligence. But first, one word more; how shall I know the business is over? can you return hither to acquaint me?"

"No," said Basil: "I must to Carcassone to collect my people, or the Lord de Foix will be upon you before you are strong enough to

resist him. Yet let me think—this I will do, I will send a trusty messenger; he shall tell you how it fares. He shall come dressed in one of our sheep skins, in which we sometimes case the wolves of Lourde. I mean in one of our disguises, a pilgrim's or a friar's gown."

"But what shall be the token," said Armagnac, "by which I may know he is the true messenger from you?"

"Why my own token," answered Le Menegeant, "my hunting knife—look upon it: when he presents that knife, you may know he is the true man. Every man of Lourde can swear to my token*."

"I note well the knife," said Armagnac; "the haft is inlaid with a cross, surmounted by a star. I know it is the ancient token of a governor of Lourde. Upon yours there are also the letters B. L. M. I shall know it. Now for the intelligence."

"This it is," replied Le Menegeant: "John de

* Knives were frequently used as tokens. Thus Sir Evan de Foix once took the knife of his father to gain access into the castle of Orthes. See Froissart.

Bearn is falling from your cause, chiefly at the instigation of the young Count Montpensier, who once saved his life, ay, and mine too, by sparing our heads for a ransom in the affair of Toulouse. This De Montpensier but now arrived at Lourde; and, by his persuasions, John de Bearn (although he will not unite with De Foix) purposes uniting his party with this Frenchman's against you. He does but now keep quiet till he can get the lady Matilda from your castle; and they talk (for I have means to find out their plans) of first subduing your injustice, as they call it, to Jane of Boulogne; and then of making war upon the Count de Foix on their own score: John de Bearn, in revenge for his brother's death, De Montpensier, in requital for the wrongs done by De Foix to his father and to himself, for it seems the Count lately imprisoned him: yet they purpose observing a truce with De Foix till they have first settled their account with you."

"Indeed!" said Armagnac, "this is intelligence I little thought to hear; I am beset on every side. De Foix, I find, intends marching

forward, as 'tis said, to lay siege to my castle, John de Bearn forsakes me, and De Montpensier induces him to join against me. What is to be done?"

"Why to resist them," answered Le Meneant: "I do not forsake you, and will not, as long as you have gold, and Jane of Boulogne's lands help to keep up the treasury; you must not lose them."

"Haste, then," said Armagnac, "to execute my orders. Jane must die! The lady Matilda I will still keep secure as a hostage. The day may yet be mine; you will bring up your men from Carcassone. Could I but get that unknown youth to betray the plans of De Foix, we should be prepared to counteract them."

"That *unknown* youth, do you call him?" said Le Meneant: "I know him well, better than he knows himself; and if you manage wisely, he may be the best instrument in your hand to serve you; and if not, you can but despatch him—that will be some revenge on John de Bearn; he is called Eustace."

“ You astonish me !” replied the Lord of Armagnac : “ how could this youth’s death work any revenge on John de Bearn ; who is he ?”

Le Mengeant looked around, and, stooping his head, he leaned forward and said, “ he is—”

“ Hush !” exclaimed Armagnac, “ I hear footsteps advancing near the door of the chamber ; speak more softly.”

“ Hark, in your ear, then,” answered Le Mengeant ; the robber bent his head, and whispered something to the lord of the castle : Armagnac started, and immediately exclaimed aloud, “ Can it be possible ? Is it true ? Is he really the—”

“ It is both possible and true,” replied Le Mengeant, “ so you will find it.”

“ This Eustace shall, then,” said Armagnac, “ be instantly cast into the dungeon, and there, if he will not betray, he shall be betrayed : he shall perish. You will set forward with your charge to the Pyrenees ; then collect your people and haste to our aid. But I hear footsteps still nearer ; they are at the door ; lift the arras,

away, Basil, begone—so, now all is safe. Who is this intruder? First let me see, and then to secure the youth; he shall to the dungeon.”

These last words the lord of Armagnac muttered in a low voice, and going to see who it was, advanced towards the door of the apartment. He assumed his usual unconcerned air, as if nothing but the commonest events had just engaged his attention.

CHAPTER V.

LOURDE.

Beneath these battlements, within those walls,
Power dwelt amidst her passions : in proud state
Each robber chief upheld his armed halls,
Doing his evil will, nor less elate
Than mightier heroes of a longer date.

CHILDE HAROLD.

THE fortress of Lourde—which but a few years previous to the date of this narrative, had been conceded to Edward the Black Prince of England, in right of his duchy of Aquitaine, and committed by him to the government of the late Sir Peter Arnaut de Bearn, as regent for Bigorre—although still nominally a dependency on England, was virtually dependent alone upon the natural strength of its position, and the valour of its governors, John de Bearn and Basil le Mengeant. These captains, with whose character and dissimilarity of disposition the reader is already acquainted, were con-

stantly at variance with each other, although they were frequently employed as mercenary allies to assist the neighbouring princes and barons in the wars they carried on. And both England and France had, by turns, made use of their assistance.

John de Bearn, though a leader of free bands, displayed in his conduct much of that generous feeling and noble spirit which distinguished a true member of chivalry. His violence had originated with his desire to revenge the murder of his brother ; and it was this desire that induced him still to command the only body of men, in the vicinity of Foix and Bearn, who dared venture to contend with and to harass the august lord of those provinces.

Le Mengeant was a bold, desperate man, who acted merely from a love of gold, contention, fraud, and violence. He was in spirit and indeed a robber, without possessing one redeeming quality, without the least beam of light to relieve the dark shadow which his vices had thrown upon his character. That the two captains of the men of Lourde, so opposite in

temper, should disagree, is not surprising; how they could at all co-operate, and for so long a period, is the point that excites our wonder; and perhaps it may alone be referred to the only feeling these two persons had in common with each other, namely, the resolution to harass De Foix, and to maintain their castle of Lourde against the united forces of all Europe, could it be supposed they would come in a body against them.

Although this may appear a bold assertion, it was one consistent with probability; for the fortress of Lourde, on account of its situation and strength, was held the wonder of the time, and so impregnable, that, if amply supplied with provisions, no force could ever succeed in attempting its capture. This immense castle, which seemed scarcely the work of human hands, and whose towers and walls were more than twenty feet in thickness, stood perched upon the top of a lofty rocky precipice in the mountains of the Pyrenees. To obtain access to the fortress, it was necessary to cross one terrific pass, called *La Garde*, which being defended at its termi-

nation with a strong tower and a gate of iron, rendering it impregnable, a few men could defend it against the world : for the pass was so narrow, that not more than two persons could go a-breast (between the rock on the one side above, and the precipice on the other below) with any degree of safety ; and even in those parts where the way was broader in extent, it was encompassed with such fearful gaps, such sudden precipices, presenting as it were at every turn a bottomless abyss, which lay before its winding track, that none but those long accustomed to the path could with any feeling of security, venture through the hazards of a road alike dangerous and difficult of access.

Edward, the Black Prince, after the battle of Najara, on his return from Spain, visited this castle, impressed with wonder and admiration, and is said to have been no less struck with its internal construction, and the strength and security of its walls and towers, than he was with the wonderful and magnificent defences nature had cast around it. Rock above rock, precipice below precipice, now guarded by a tremendous gulf,

formed by a cleft in the rocks, so narrow at the top, that the trunk of a tree, when thrown athwart it, might serve as a dizzy and uncertain footing for the passenger; yet so deep was the gulf, that the mountain torrent, which thundered down its sides, could scarcely be distinguished at the bottom, as its waters rolled foaming and dashing below, in the midst of darkness, encircled by rocks overgrown with vegetation, but so shrouded in obscurity by their height, that no beam of the sun ever yet strayed into their precincts, or gleamed upon their base.

Lourde commanded an extent of view far beyond the compass of the eye to distinguish its detail. Towns, hills, villages, and cities, looked but as so many specks in a map when seen from its lofty summit. The castle commanded the view of the whole of Gascony, and many of the neighbouring provinces; and the rivers that flowed through them, broad, and extensive as they were, looked from these heights but as so many threads, or lines circling through the countries which they enriched by their course. And it was by no means an uncommon spectacle,

to view the towers of Lourde, rearing their gray and pointed tops, sometimes sparkling with the beams of the sun that played upon them, above the clouds, that hung half way down the precipitous rock which formed their base. When thus viewed, the effect was dazzling and sublime; and the fortress of the robber chiefs seemed more like a castle of the powers of the air than the habitation of mere humanity.

It is to the interior of this castle we must now conduct the reader. The time was that of afternoon, when, fatigued by a journey of some distance, from which they had but lately returned, the people of John de Bearn were refreshing themselves within the hall of the castle. Some of the men were still seated round a long table, drinking wine, and conversing upon their late journey, their former exploits, or their plans for future ones; whilst others, with whom fatigue was forgotten when any sport might be pursued, had quitted the hall, and were amusing themselves in the court-yard of the outer courts, by playing at tennis, pitching the bar, coits, &c. These men were something boisterous in the ex-

ercise of their amusements; but those within the hall, though they freely indulged the mirth of their recreative hours, still observed in their demeanour a degree of decency and order, that must be attributed to a feeling of awe and respect for their captain, John de Bearn, who, apart from his people, appeared seated on the dais, at the upper end of the hall, with the youthful Count de Montpensier on his right, and our old acquaintance, Agos de Guisfort, on his left hand.

The scene which thus presented itself, was such as might have been worthy the pencil of Salvator Rosa, had he been then in existence. The hall was of great height and extent; the carved oak ceiling—a feature of such striking beauty in the Gothic hall—appeared with all its rich and sombre character of magnificence, presenting the finest combinations in its perspective lines; the walls were hung with various implements of war; and here was seen an entire suit of body armour, the haubergeon of mail, the plates that formed the greaves, the garde-bras, the poldron, and the gauntlets; these were surmounted by the basinet and the ponderous

helmet, there hung the lance, the dagger, or the axe, and beneath, the shield and target: above these trophies of war, appeared those of the chase (which in some measure may be considered an image of war itself); the spreading antlers threw wide their extended branches, whilst the hunting horn and spear hung beneath them. The armour was bright and glittering, and like a thousand mirrors, reflected the objects around, or caught the deep hues of the stained glass, as the light streamed through the arched and pointed windows of the hall; some portions of the glass represented the emblazoned arms of Edward, Prince of Wales, and those of the various governors of Lourde; and the cross and star of the late Sir Peter Arnaut de Bearn (which since his death had been considered the especial cognizance of a man of Lourde) shone conspicuous, with all its many-coloured dyes and rays of beauty. Religious emblems too were not forgotten; for the founder of the castle, holding an elevation of the building within his hands, was represented kneeling before a shrine in the attitude of prayer, supported on

the one side by the Virgin Mary, and on the other by the holy St. Catherine, leaning upon her wheel. These subjects, although executed on a material so difficult as that of stained glass, possessed the fine simplicity and grace peculiar to the gothic ages; and the deep blue and red draperies of the figures appeared so rich yet dazzling, that the eye could not long rest upon them without pain.

The hall was strewn with fresh rushes, a luxury in this warm climate, and the doors beneath the carved and fretted archway were thrown open to admit a freer circulation of the air; the heat was indeed oppressive. Most of the men of Lourde, who were thus regaling themselves, had taken off all their armour, and appeared with only the light cloth or leather dress they were accustomed to wear beneath it; their heads and throats were bare. The black and dishevelled locks, the fierce aspect, with the dark brown and swarthy complexion of these mountain freebooters, seemed fully to bespeak their habits those of a wild and lawless life, supported by a bold and daring spirit. But even the strength

of the lion, though it is let loose upon every other creature, will lie dormant before its keeper; even so did these hardy spirits of Lourde yield them to their leader, John de Bearn. Each man at the table seemed engaged either in the general subject of conversation, or in a particular discourse with the comrade who sat next to him; but none either listened to, or presumed to interrupt, the conversation that was passing between John de Bearn and his guests.

Indeed, they sat apart from the rest, and appeared much interested in the subject of their discussion. John de Bearn was more than forty years old, his person was tall and majestic, and his features were of that form we call Roman; his forehead was high and pointed, and his countenance expressed a benignity of heart, and a tranquillity of temper, that seemed inconsistent with the character of a governor of Lourde. He also was unarmed; his dress was of black cloth, a habit which he vowed never to exchange for one of a less mournful kind, at the time he put it on, till he should have amply revenged the death of his brother, Sir Peter Arnaut de Bearn.

We shall not here repeat the conversation which passed, as it related to those plans the reader is already acquainted with, by Le Meneant's having communicated his knowledge of them to the Lord of Armagnac in the preceding chapter. It was agreed that the most prudent measure they could adopt would be, not to declare war upon the Count de Foix, till they should have first attempted to subdue the insolence of Armagnac, and to make him restore to Jane of Boulogne her lands; for although De Bearn hated De Foix, he had been attached to the family of Jane in former times, and his chivalrous spirit prompted him to join in the cause of an injured woman, when its object was the restoration of her rights. "Yet," said De Montpensier, "I wish before we commence the attack, we could get the Lady Matilda de Bearn from the hands of Armagnac, who, you say, has entrapped her within his castle during your absence from Lourde."

"It would be in vain to attempt it," replied John de Bearn, "except in the way of arms; but the Lord d'Albreth, who is with his uncle,

is of too noble a spirit to allow Armagnac to attempt her life. We must give her liberty by subduing the treacherous ally who thus artfully detains her."

"And what," inquired De Montpensier, "will be your plan of attack on the castle of this Armagnac?"

"That I shall well consider," said De Bearn, "and we will then confer upon it. I know the castle well; every tower, every apartment, ay, every inch of it is known to me; for Le Meneant and myself once took it by surprise from a tyrannical baron, who was an enemy to Lourde. For more than a year we held it in possession, and I was its governor, whilst Le Meneant remained at Lourde: but no longer wanting the castle, we sold it to this Lord of Armagnac, who has since resided there; but he knows not his own castle so well as I do; for, placing but little confidence in his alliance, I did not communicate to him all the secrets of that castle."

"I am glad to hear it," said Agos de Guisfort, "for I too know something of storming castles; and I have often found a well-planned stratagem

has given success to an enterprise that strength alone could never have accomplished. If you should hereafter think of any such matter, may I crave to be admitted of your council; for, perhaps, I may be the man to serve you."

"Agos hath, indeed," observed De Montpensier, "much skill and address in such adventures; and I would stake my life upon his courage and fidelity."

"That is more than I would on your prudence, my lord," said Agos; "for, think into what a strait you brought your own head and mine too, by visiting the court of your enemy as a disguised Poursuivant d'Amour. We had well nigh paid dearly for that frolic by more ways than one; for when that same man, or ghost, (for on the faith of an esquire I doubt which he might be) offered you the lily at the banquet, he certainly intended it as an emblematical hint *that* he knew who you really were, else had he never thus mysteriously presented to you the cognizance of France."

"It is most true," replied De Montpensier, "that armed stranger was, indeed, a most extra-

ordinary being : I lament that I did not see his face ; for if he be a man (which I am inclined to believe in despite of witchcraft) I would fain know who he is, that I might thank him for the honour and forbearance he evinced towards me."

" If he be a man," said Agos, " he tilted the knights out of their saddles with the agility of a devil ; for your devil, though he be bad, is the personage to whom we refer all excellence in the crafts. Thus, a man is said to fight like a fiend, to ride like the devil, and so forth, through the whole catalogue of gentlemanly accomplishments. But, to our present business. if I mistake not, my lord, your present declaration of war against the Count de Foix, is not very like to gain his approbation to your suit for the lady Jane. How will you win her ?"

" Even as a knight should," answered De Montpensier ; " by the valour of my heart, and the strength of my arm ; and I think the Lady Jane would not refuse to be so won, since she has already told me, the Count will never consent to our union ; more upon this point she

would not reveal, although I urged her to it; but hope and a good sword shall be my arms to beat down despairing thoughts. Jane of Boulogne is worth living to possess, or dying in the attempt to gain her. But, come, De Bearn, you are thoughtful; shall we go round the castle? Will you show me its strength?"

John de Bearn assented, and arose from his seat to conduct his guests around the castle. As he quitted the chair of carved oak, that stood on the dais, he looked upon it with an expression of deep and melancholy feeling. "There," said he, to Montpensier, "in that very chair sat the gallant Edward, Prince of Wales, when he conferred upon my unfortunate brother the government of this castle; and in that very chair, a little while after, sat also that brother when he deputed to me its government, whilst he went to attend the treacherous summons of the Count de Foix. There also was seated my brother's widow, then the lovely and young Lady Matilda de Bearn, when I solemnly vowed (upon the book of the holy Evangelists, which she held in her hands as I knelt before her) to revenge the murder of her

husband. That chair is a remarkable appendage to this castle; for it has been prophesied, that it shall never hold a governor feasting in this hall his people at the banquet of peace, till the blood of De Bearn is avenged, and the lost heir of his house is restored."

"The lost heir of his house!" exclaimed De Montpensier: "had he an heir? I never heard this named."

"No more of it, then, now," said John de Bearn, as he hastily crossed his hand before his eyes to wipe away the tear that moistened their lids: "let us proceed to view the castle."

John de Bearn conducted the Prince and his esquire through the various apartments of the castle: their extent, strength, and situation astonished the guests. "Holy Mary!" exclaimed the young Count, as they were crossing beneath the archway of the great gates, that led to the draw-bridge, "I would rather be here as a friend than as a prisoner; for no one who passes within these gates a captive, could hope for redemption by the force of arms from without."

"It is true," said John de Bearn; "but yet

the difficulty would rather rest in the impossibility to cross a body of men at arms by the single pass of La Garde, than in the strength even of these castle walls. After we have visited the barbican, we will go on to the tower which guards the termination of the pass. It is now empty; for we have so little fear, that excepting there should be an enemy posted in our vicinity, we never place a watch in that tower till the approach of night, when the iron gate is locked and barred within, the watch posted, and the beacon lighted. We will to the barbican, and La Garde, unless you fear the threatening aspect of the clouds that seem to augur a coming storm."

"No," replied De Montpensier; "Agos and myself have braved a storm together before now; and should this prove violent, we can take shelter in the tower of La Garde."

"Let it be so," answered De Bearn; "we will now on to the barbican."

The party advanced; they visited the barbican, together with its precincts, and had made a considerable progress towards the tower of La Garde, when the clouds, that had long been ga-

thering with portentous blackness, began to discharge their burdens in large and heavy drops of rain, whilst a distant clap of thunder rolled its many and repeated sounds through the lofty Pyrenees. "We shall have a fearful storm," said De Montpensier; "shall we return to the barbican, or hasten on to gain the tower?"

"The tower is nearer," answered John de Bearn; "and these mountain storms sometimes pass off as quickly as they come on."

"To the tower, then," said Agos de Guisfort: "I shall have no objection to view a storm once in my life from a height that might offer a nest for the eagle."

The party soon gained the tower of La Garde. The Count and De Bearn ascended the winding-stairs, and amused themselves above (for De Bearn had the keys) with examining the interior, the arms, machines of defence, &c. which were always kept as stores in readiness, within the jaws of this Cerberus of the mountains. Agos remained below in a small apartment near the wicket, where they had first entered upon coming to the tower. He was alone. Why this should be the

case, and for what purpose he remained there, whilst the others ascended, it is impossible to say; unless it might be supposed to have arisen from one of those unconscious motives, or indefinable trains of thought, that frequently fix a man in a particular seat or place without his knowing wherefore; but certain it is, he was there, and stood fixed at a small window of the apartment, whence he contemplated the vast scene before him, and the changes it underwent by the fluctuations of the storm.

The highest points of the Pyrenees, which were visible from this tower, crowned with eternal snows, grand and irregular in their forms, were now completely enveloped in a mass of dense, black, and heavy clouds. Anon these slowly passed away, and again exposed the majestic summits of the mountains, rising like distant points of land from out the sea of floating vapour that encompassed their base, and wholly obscured the valley beneath; whilst the vivid and forked lightnings played from peak to peak, and the thunder burst above, and seemed to shake even the very foundation of these firm and

everlasting rocks, as it rolled its deep cadence from mountain to mountain; the echoes redoubled every sound, as if to send it back again, and, like the continued roar of cannon, to keep alive the fierce war of contending elements. The rain came pattering down in black and heavy drops; whilst the wind, that swept every thing before it in the fury of its course, bowed the tops of the mountain-pines, or tore them up by the roots.

Whilst Agos stood at the little window, he perceived, amidst the storm, two figures ascending the terrific pass: the first, clad in light drapery, seemed attempting to outstep the second, as fast as the wind and rain would allow them to make their way. The second figure appeared to be that of a man of more than ordinary height. The hurried step of the first person, whose head every now and then was turned back as if to see how far the second had advanced, indicated apprehension. This flying person, whom Agos soon perceived wore the attire of a woman, at length came to a spot so dangerous, that one false step must be fatal. An irregular line of rock, not unlike a flight of steps, was on the

one side, and the narrow pathway close to it, at whose verge, on the other, (at the distance only of a few feet,) stood the awful and terrific precipice of La Garde, which, without one stone, rock, or even bush to intercept the abyss, hung over the valley beneath in a perpendicular height of above six hundred feet.

When the woman had gained the summit of this terrific pass, the man suddenly darted forward as if to seize her: Agos involuntarily shuddered, and rushed from the tower: the impulse and the act were momentary; it was evident the wretched man had some ill design upon the helpless woman: Agos thought her fall, her death, must be accomplished ere he could advance only a few steps to her aid. Yet the feelings of a brave man are as spontaneous as they are generous: he rushed forward, although convinced his efforts would be useless. But what was his amazement when he beheld the woman, light as the bird that flies from branch to branch, or rather like the nimble hare when she springs from her pursuers, at the very moment the ruffian was about to seize her, bound from his grasp;

and suddenly leaping upon a small point of the rock by the way side, ascend another and another, till she stood beyond the reach of his grasp; yet in a position of such fearful danger, on so uncertain a footing, that the small point of the rock which supported her light figure might every instant break from its hold, and tumble her headlong down the gulf. The very wind, which blew so loud, might shake her off her stand with as much ease as it tears from the branch the delicate leaf that quivers before it.

Agos rushed on, and holding his uplifted dagger firmly grasped in his hand, he placed himself in the narrow pathway immediately beneath that part of the rock where this active and daring female had taken her fearful stand. Agos stood with his face towards the ruffian, and raising his dagger, as the lightning at that moment was reflected on its blade, he exclaimed aloud, "Advance another step, and by all that is sacred in heaven, I will instantly plunge my dagger in your breast!" Agos had the advantage of position; for he stood rather raised above his opponent, (who was ascending the acclivity,)

and in the very centre of the path. The ruffian paused, and drew his own dagger. "Woman," exclaimed Agos, "come down, come down! the rock is giving way! I will keep the pass, and defend you with my life. Descend instantly, or you are lost!"

In a few seconds the woman descended from her lofty perch, bounding from one point of rock to another, with an active, firm, and light step. But scarcely had she reached the ground, and stood at the back of Agos de Guisfort, who still defended the pass, when the portion of the rock on which she had taken her stand broke from its hold, and rolling forward, passed between Agos and the ruffian, and fell with a tremendous crash down the gulf. A loud scream instantly followed; and the eagle, affrighted and startled in her nest amidst the rocks, spread abroad her wings, and sprang up, flapping them to and fro from her sides as she passed over their heads towards the summit of La Garde.

"God be praised!" said the woman in a low, agitated voice, as she addressed Agos, "you have saved me." Agos still kept his position; but

turning his head for a moment towards the woman, he perceived she was closely veiled, and wore besides the hood and wimple, so that her face could not be seen. "Go;" he cried, "lose not a moment. Hasten to yonder tower; it contains two brave men, who will protect you. Leave me to deal with this ruffian." The woman obeyed; and again bounding forward with the same active step, she made for the tower.

Scarcely was she gone, when the daring villain, conscious of superior strength, attempted to rush past Agos, and as he did so, to strike him with his dagger. Agos threw himself back, and leaned firmly against the rock; the villain passed, but turned again, determined this time to strike the brave Esquire; but the eye of Agos was as keen in watching his opportunity, as his heart was bold to seize it. This was the moment of victory: he resolved to stab the ruffian in the breast; he made a desperate thrust, but, still leaning against the rock for security, the dagger was not surely aimed, and its point entered above the right breast. The man staggered, dropt his own dagger, but did not fall; and seeming to fear

the precipice more than Agos de Guisfort, he made a step or two nearer to the rock, and fell against it, with his arm resting upon one of its projections, for support. Agos, who, but a moment before, would have hurled him down the pass at the hazard of his own life, once more raised his dagger; but he saw the wretched outlaw faint and bleeding. Agos let fall his arm without striking a second blow; he could not do it, for he was a brave man: the brave are merciful.

At this moment Agos de Guisfort perceived the Count de Montpensier and John de Bearn advancing towards him; he had no doubt the woman had reached the tower, and given the alarm, and that they were come to his assistance. This was, in fact, the case; she had done so. The instant John de Bearn beheld the wounded man, who growing more and more faint, was still leaning on the rock for support, he exclaimed, "Holy St. Benedict, it is Le Mengeant! his blood flows fast—he seems about to fall—support him, lead him gently from this dangerous point; for although I abhor the cruelties he has too

often committed, and think he deserves this chastisement, yet, as my fellow captain in Lourde, I must not let him perish for want of help. Agos, lead him to the tower." And De Bearn added in a whisper, "The woman with the veil says he has carried her from the castle of Armagnac, by the desire of its lord, with an intent, as she believes, to murder her in this pass. We may make use of this sickness of Le Mengeant's, even if there be no danger, to terrify him into a confession of Armagnac's plans; for I know Le Mengeant. He is bold and daring in health; but when lying under the smart of a wound, he will fear death like a priest who is unshriven. This Le Mengeant may give success to all our plans if we but manage him wisely. Forward to the tower with him!"

By the assistance of Agos and De Bearn, Le Mengeant was carefully removed; but from the quantity of blood he had lost, he fainted soon after reaching the tower. John de Bearn immediately hastened to procure assistance from the castle, whither the wounded robber captain was speedily conveyed, and received every ne-

cessary attention. De Bearn caused him to be carried to his own chamber, and declared he would himself watch the progress of his sickness, whilst De Montpensier and Agos, who doubted not but that the ruffian's intelligence might prove of the utmost service to their plans, could they alarm him by the fears of death into a confession, felt most anxious to preserve his life. Agos assisted in removing his apparel, during which service he did not scruple to possess himself of whatever papers and other things Le Mengeant had about him; these he committed to the hands of De Bearn, who declared he would examine them at his first leisure. All things needful having been done for the robber, whilst he appeared almost in an insensible state, he was at length placed upon a couch, and left to his repose, under the care of a faithful adherent of De Bearn.

“And now,” said De Montpensier, “let us visit the afflicted lady, whose life Providence has thus miraculously preserved through the means of Agos de Guisfort: where is she?”

“I have placed her,” replied De Bearn, “for

there was no time for ceremony, in a private chamber of my own, where we will visit her; and having heard whatever she may desire to relate of this extraordinary affair, I will see that every respect and attention is paid to her whilst she remains within these walls."

When the party entered the chamber, the afflicted lady who was still veiled, arose and bowed to her preserver, but she did not speak. John de Bearn advanced, and, after offering her every assurance of protection, he begged to be informed whom he had the honour of addressing, and if she would draw aside her veil in the presence of her friends. The lady immediately complied with the last request; and no sooner had she removed this shroud that concealed her face, than Agos de Guisfort, exclaimed aloud, "By all the saints in heaven! it is Will of the West, and our afflicted lady is changed into no less a person than a swaggering young page, that hung about the skirts of Jane of Boulogne at the court of De Foix. I thought the lady a rare skipper amongst the rocks; but your pages are too well accustomed to tricks of the sort

any longer to make such light frisking a matter of surprise; and pray, my lady page, how came you in that woman's gear?"

"Truly," said Will, with his accustomed pertness: "even, as you came into your squire's habit, by its fitting your person, service, and occasion. The Lord of Armagnac ordered my Lady Jane of Boulogne, who is his captive, to accompany a ruffian to the Pyrenees; she feared he intended some harm to her life by such a measure, and believing he would not dare venture to do her personal injury, whilst surrounded by many brave knights in his own castle, the Lady Matilda persuaded her to let me accompany that Le Mengeant, in her stead, dressed in woman's attire, and closely veiled. Jane of Boulogne objected, lest I should suffer, but we soon convinced her, that I was not likely to be an object of their ill designs, and that I also could better escape from their clutches; so the ladies dressed me up amongst them, and I kept an obstinate silence during the journey: you know the rest; but I verily believe I might not have escaped quite so easily as I thought to

do, had it not been for the help of that worthy appendage of a knight, Master Agos de Guisfort."

De Montpensier expressed his grief and surprise to hear that Jane of Boulogne was a prisoner in the castle of the Lord of Armagnac, and he was so impatient to fly to her relief, that he conjured John de Bearn to think upon some immediate plan for marching forward his people, and at once attacking the castle, especially as the young Count expected a large body of men at arms to join him speedily at Tarbes.

De Bearn promised that he would lose no time, as the danger of Jane of Boulogne must be great, should Armagnac discover she was still within his power before they could commence the assault upon the castle. Agos urged the necessity of examining the papers of Le Meneant, and of inducing him by the terrors of supposed danger from his wound, to make a confession. "Then," said Agos, "whatever you do, let it be speedy; but first consult me upon the plan of its execution. And now let us hear whatever intelligence this page may be able

to communicate, for it is necessary we should know what friends we have within the castle to be saved, as well as enemies to be destroyed."

Will of the West, who had much of the self-importance, which usually belongs to young narrators, gladly complied with this request, and told the whole story, from the time of his committal to the monastery, down to the present hour. He enlarged upon his own skill in carrying off from St. Mary's the ladies Jane and Isabel. He related their capture in the forest, with that of the gallant Eustace, who, he said, had been thrown into *the dungeon of the eastern tower* of Armagnac's castle but a few hours before he himself had quitted it with Le Mengeant. In short, the page related every thing that had happened within his knowledge, save one small circumstance, viz. that he master William had been in the first instance consigned to the monastery to receive a whipping, by order of the Prior. Now, whether he thought this an unnecessary repetition, or that it was somewhat derogatory to his own dignity, or injurious to the reputation of the honourable order of pages, we cannot say;

but certain it is, he either softened or exchanged the word *whipping* into that of *meditation*, by saying he had been committed to St. Mary's, in order that he should there have an opportunity of meditating for the benefit of his soul's health.

All the parties present listened with deep attention to this narrative ; and the countenance of John de Bearn expressed an evident emotion of grief and anxiety, when he heard that Eustace was confined by the Lord of Armagnac within the dungeon of the eastern tower of the castle.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RECOGNITION.

I am not mad : this hair I tear is mine ;
My name is Constance ; I was Geoffrey's wife ;
Young Arthur is my son, and he is lost :
I am not mad ;—I would to Heaven I were !
For then, 'tis like I should forget myself :
Oh ! if I could, what grief should I forget !

SHAKESPEARE.

WITHIN the eastern tower of the castle of the Lord of Armagnac, there was a dungeon, built under ground, the walls of which, thick and massive, helped to form the foundations of the tower. This gloomy habitation for the helpless or the guilty, received its light from a small and strongly barred aperture (next the ceiling, and just above the surface of the earth without) which, from its size and irregular form, could scarcely be called a window. The walls were of stone, and reeking from the damps

of the place, which even in the warmest day of summer, threw a chill upon every creature who might enter within its precincts. The floor was formed of large square stones, in some parts loose and broken, and in the centre of two or three of them, appeared an iron ring, fixed there for the purpose of chaining any unfortunate prisoner to the ground. An oaken table, and a long bench, covered with straw, now formed the furniture of this apartment.

Before the table, wrapped in a cloak, with his head reclining upon his arm, was seated Eustace, the captive and inhabitant of this dungeon. He was musing. After a while he arose, walked two or three turns around the apartment, and then advanced towards the aperture that admitted light. He looked upwards, clasped his hands together, and, falling upon his knees, poured forth his soul in fervent prayer. Whilst he was thus engaged, footsteps were heard from without, and the harsh grating of the key, with the falling of bar and bolt, proclaimed that some one was about to enter. The door at length opened, and admitted a man, whose countenance, though rough,

looked at once serious and anxious. This man paused a moment, as if uncertain in what manner he should address the prisoner : it was that pause which expressed hesitation and reluctance ; it bespoke a communication rather of necessity than free will. “ I am here again,” he said at last, addressing Eustace ; “ you know the purpose for which I come ; I am compelled to it, by the duty to which I am sworn.”

“ I know it,” answered Eustace ; “ I blame not you ; but my resolution is already taken.”

“ Am I still then,” inquired the man, “ to return the same answer to the Lord of Armagnac, that you will neither communicate any thing you know respecting the plans of De Foix, nor your knowledge of the castle of Orthes ; you will not describe its weakest points ?”

“ I will do neither,” replied Eustace ; “ tell Armagnac I am content to die : that he may consign my body to the grave, but that he cannot turn my mind to infamy. Why do you not hasten to him ?”

“ Because I hope your mind may change,” said the man ; “ you are young, and I pity you.”

“ Pity me !” exclaimed Eustace ; “ alas ! that is a word that sounds strangely from the mouth of one who is a creature of my Lord of Armagnac : he should employ another in this office, or you should bear a stubborn nature, and not the tenderness of pity.”

“ I did so once,” answered the warder, or keeper of the tower ; “ but I am in affliction now, and the unhappy are more apt to feel for others than the prosperous ; my only child is lying on its death-bed, within the ward of this tower.”

“ Unhappy man !” said Eustace, “ I can pity you : you sorrow for your child ; but my griefs will end with my life. I would then, as you feel for me, ask but this favour of you, that I might have a priest to shrive me before death.”

“ Alas !” replied the keeper, “ the Lord of Armagnac would not allow one to enter within these walls ; the chapel of the castle is used for a store-house for arms : mass has never been said since he became lord of it.”

“ And why do you then,” inquired Eustace,

“serve a lord who is thus abandoned to wickedness and cruelty?”

“Custom and necessity make us do many things,” answered the man. “I have lived with my lord for many years; and I was starving when I came to his service: for a small offence against the church I was outlawed and excommunicated; so no other lord would employ me: I came hither rather than join Le Mengeant, who would have had me, at Lourde. Is there aught else I can do for you? it will be impossible to bring here a priest.”

“Yes,” said Eustace; “the Lady Matilda de Bearn attended me whilst I suffered from my wound; she, too, endeavoured to induce me to betray the Count de Foix; and as she did so, Armagnac has allowed her to visit me within this dungeon: I could wish to speak with her before I die.”

“I will tell her so,” answered the keeper; “she has endeavoured to save the life of my child, but it will not do: all medicine is useless; the poor boy must die. I will send the Lady

Matilda to you ; but be brief ; you have but a few hours to live."

" I am prepared," said Eustace ; " and Heaven, who forbids me the consolation of its minister in my last hours, will, I trust, accept my imperfect efforts of repentance. Good fellow, hasten to do my bidding."—The keeper quitted the dungeon, and in a short space returned, conducting the Lady Matilda. The door was again unbarred, and she entered alone : her countenance was deadly pale ; her eye looked less brilliant, and her limbs seemed weak and tottering. Eustace regarded her with pity and with gratitude, he assisted her to the bench ; and notwithstanding his own situation, he endeavoured to compose her spirits before he entered upon the subject that was nearest to his heart. Lady Matilda wept ; even her stern and self-commanding nature gave way before the feelings excited by viewing so much firmness and composure in one about to die. " Oh, unhappy youth !" she exclaimed, " and must it—must it be thus ? can nothing prevail with you !"

" Nothing to betray my benefactor," answered

Eustace; "the Count de Foix, although lately displeased with me, from the active malice of others, brought me up from a child as his own son: speak no more, therefore, upon that subject; but hear a dying man's last request."

"I will," replied Matilda, "I will be firm; and that request, if I have the power to fulfil it, shall be accomplished."

"You have the power," answered Eustace. "The Lady Jane of Boulogne and Isabel de Greilly are both prisoners in this castle, although not confined, as I am, within the walls of a dungeon. You have free access to them both."

"Yes," said Matilda; "but the Lord of Armagnac thinks Jane of Boulogne is not here, as I before have told you; for her security, therefore, I have placed her within a small chamber near my own: and Armagnac has been made to believe the young page lies in that chamber sick, from the consequences of the late encounter in the forest, and the alarm of his imprisonment."

"I recollect it well," replied Eustace: "to the Lady Jane I would send my last farewell, and my prayers that Heaven may still preserve

her, which I doubt not; for De Foix, I trust, will soon give freedom both to her and Isabel de Greilly. It is of Isabel I would speak."

Eustace pronounced the name of Isabel in a faltering voice. He paused, and seemed to make an effort to acquire firmness sufficient to declare his purpose. "Lady Matilda," he continued, "you, perhaps, have known in early youth the power of a long and ardent attachment; but let me not distress you, it is of myself I should speak. You will not then, like many who have lived to a mature age, or as the cold-hearted do, scoff at a feeling that too often destroys the happiness of youth. It has destroyed mine. I loved Isabel, and she but ill requited my sincere affection: but it is past. I love her still, and I would quit this life in charity with all the world. Will you, therefore, tell her, when I shall be no more, that the brother of her infant years, the lover of her riper age, died forgiving and blessing her, still true in affection, and sent to her this ring as a last and dying token?"

The eyes of Eustace were suffused with tears as he spoke ; and the lady Matilda seemed overpowered with emotions of tenderness and pity by this address. “ I will,” she said, “ I will give it to her. Isabel shall have the token.” Eustace then drew from his finger that very ring of his knighthood to which so many extraordinary circumstances seemed to be attached. Lady Matilda turned aside her head to conceal the tears that flowed involuntarily down her cheeks, as Eustace placed the ring upon a finger of her hand. Eustace still held that hand within his own ; and respectfully pressing it to his lips, he said, “ May Heaven reward you for this act of kindness to a wretched man ! You have done much for me. In my sickness you watched by me ; in my prison you comforted me. Bless me, oh ! then bless me in my dying hour ! My thoughts are now no longer of the earth.”

Lady Matilda, deeply affected by these words, turned towards Eustace as he dropped upon his knees to receive her blessing. She raised her clasped hands to bestow it upon him ; and as

she did so, her eye glanced at the ring he had placed on her finger. She started wildly at the sight; her countenance, already pale, became of an ashy whiteness, as she beheld it. Every limb trembled; and, with almost breathless impatience, she exclaimed, "Oh! Heaven, who art thou? Speak! who art thou? The ring—the ring!" Eustace started from the ground, and caught her, as she seemed about to fall, in his arms. Terror and surprise for a moment kept him silent. Lady Matilda opened her eyes, paused as if to breathe, and again looking upon the ring, and then at Eustace, she exclaimed, "Who art thou? Tell me, how came you by that ring? Your name, your name—is it Arnaut?—is it?"

"The ring," replied Eustace, "was given with me by the Countess de Foix, when she committed me as an orphan child to the care of her lord. She called me Eustace, and the ring was placed upon my hand the day I became a knight."

"All merciful Heaven!" said Matilda, as she threw her arms around the neck of Eustace,

and hysterically burst into a flood of tears, "You are—you are my son!"

"My mother!" exclaimed Eustace: "are *you* my mother? And is it thus we meet? and is it here," he continued, as his eye glanced round the dungeon, "is it here that I must beg a blessing ere I die? Is it here a son must comfort the wounded and broken heart of a widowed mother?"

"No," said Matilda, as she wildly started from his embrace, "not here. You shall comfort her with a better hope elsewhere. You shall avenge your murdered father."

Eustace shuddered, and again attempted to clasp his mother to his bosom. She fixed her eyes, filled with tears, upon him, and bursting into a loud exclamation, that seemed like the shrill cry of madness, she said, "But no, no, no! you must die—you must die!" She paused, and again starting, laughed aloud, and yet more wildly exclaimed, "Yet, yet you may live! Yes, you may live! All shall be well. You shall live to avenge your father! Come, come," she continued, "to Armagnac: we will seek

Armagnac. You shall tell him all he would know: you shall betray the Count, as he betrayed your father!"

"Oh! whither go you, my poor wandering mother?" said Eustace: "the door is barred upon us. Had I but liberty, I would avenge my father: I would avenge him as a son. The Count de Foix should answer for his death at the sword's point, man to man; but, oh! do not, do not tempt me to betray him like a traitor, to murder him as an assassin!"

"He did so by your father," replied Matilda more collectedly. "Armagnac will be here: he comes for the last time, to try if you will speak. Your life, my life is in your own power. Betray the Count, and we are saved: be silent, and you die. But no, you will not kill me! Rob me not of husband and son both! Both dead! Oh! for my sake have pity on yourself! The Count betrayed your father."

"His guilt could never sanction mine," replied Eustace. "If Armagnac will spare my life, I will challenge De Foix to mortal combat in the open field: we will not part till death

shall end the one of us; but oh! do not, my mother, I conjure you, do not, in these dreadful moments, tempt me to the ruin of my soul and body both. I can suffer; but let me not think I kill my mother! Oh! live, live still to revenge my father; and if I must die, and De Foix escape my hand, may Heaven visit him with deep remorse, and so forgive him."

"Forgive him!" exclaimed Matilda, "may Heaven's curse fall heavy on the murderer's head. He stabbed thy father to the heart; my husband's blood lies yet fresh upon his dagger. De Foix kept possession too of a castle that was De Bearn's, where I and thy infant self, Eustace, sometimes lived, for the wars kept us away from Lourde till they should be ended. We were at that castle at the time this horrid act was done. The Countess de Foix, my early friend, feared that her treacherous husband would seek to have thee conveyed away, lest thou shouldst live to revenge thy father's death; and to claim his rights to save thee, she took thee from thy wretched mother, who was then raving, and confined as a miserable maniac.

What she did with thee we never knew, for the Countess soon after left Orthes for Spain. I was at length restored to reason ; but the constant wars with Spain prevented our seeking the Countess to know where she had placed my child. Peace came at last, and thy uncle, John de Bearn, sought her but lately at Navarre. The Countess de Foix told him all the truth ; but this he did not fully communicate to me. From him I learnt thou wast living, and that he would endeavour to bring thee to Lourde ; but John de Bearn never told me my son was in the court of De Foix : he feared to do it, for he too well knew I would have sought thee there, with my dagger in my hand. Yet he left me in the habit of a Franciscan, his common disguise, to shelter him amidst foes. He went to seek thee, and I sent, with my blessing, this command, that he should alone make known to you the secret of your birth, on condition that you would first swear to avenge, as he should direct, your father's murder. I have not since seen John de Bearn ; he had not returned to Lourde when

Armagnac induced me to leave it for this castle."

"I saw him at Orthes," said Eustace, "as a Franciscan, and I refused to take the oath, as he required it of me. Yet I obeyed his injunctions, for I was on my way to Lourde when I became a prisoner to Armagnac. Here is the cross suspended round my neck that the Franciscan, as I thought him to be, gave me as a token, that would admit me within the walls of Lourde."

"It was thy father's token," said Matilda: "the ring too was thy father's. The Countess carried it away with thy innocent self, when I scarcely knew what she did. That ring too has its fellow. John de Bearn, and my unhappy husband, were *twin brothers*, and their rings of knighthood were alike."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Eustace: "Then—But hark! who comes hither? Be calm, my mother, let us meet this hour as becomes us."

Eustace supported the unhappy Lady Matilda in his arms, whilst the door of the dungeon

opened, and the lord of Armagnac, followed by the keeper of the tower, entered. The latter bore in his hand an axe; and the countenance of Armagnac, flushed with anger, seemed to evince the highest degree of wrath a nature so wantonly cruel could outwardly express. "Tear them asunder!" he exclaimed; "away with him! His head shall fall from off the block within the hour. Since he will brave us, he shall suffer for it. Take the tigress from her whelp, and if her delight be in blood and vengeance, the first effects of them she beholds shall be in the court-yard yonder, by the death of her own son. John de Bearn shall pay dearly for his breach of faith, his treachery. Part them this moment!"

"Never," exclaimed Matilda; "never whilst I have life shall the wretch breathe who dares to part us!" As the unhappy Matilda uttered these words, she threw herself before Eustace, and firmly grasped his arm. The weakness that had before seemed to oppress her was gone, and a more than natural energy arose in her soul, animated every look, and flushed her

hitherto pallid cheek. "Keep off, keep off," she cried, as the gaoler advanced to take Eustace from her : "Keep off, or dread a mother's curse. Oh, Heaven will hear it ; it will avenge me ; its fire shall fall to crush you !"

Armagnac now stepped forward, as if to interfere. Matilda let go her son, and suddenly rushing towards him, she threw herself at the feet of Armagnac, and so firmly grasped his hands, that he could not shake her off. "Yet hear me," she said, "yet hear me. Oh ! if you have ever known one touch of human feeling ; if you have ever loved one thing on earth, were it but a dog, or a poor caged bird, yet pity me. Think what it is to love ; to lose the only, only creature your heart ever turned to. Think that you saw it dead, killed, crushed beneath your foot, and then think, if you can, what must be my misery. A mother's sorrow to lose her only child ; a widowed mother too ! One who as she had nursed that very child, when a babe, at her bosom, and saw it lie smiling on the breast it milked, who even then remembered her infant could only smile so, look so, because

it was too young to know itself fatherless, its mother widowed; else had every kindly drop that moistened its innocent lips, as showers feed the blossom, been turned to gall, to bitterness, to misery !”

“ Unhand me, frantic woman !” exclaimed Armagnac, “ unhand me !”

“ I know it,” said Matilda, “ I know that I am mad, and I am reckless; but oh, there is a deep, deep misery in madness ! it wanders, but in wretchedness, and changes reason but for agony. I will not leave you, I will watch round about you, hang upon your cloak thus till I die ; and then my spirit shall visit you, to beg you spare my child. He is a man now, but a mother still loves, and thinks of her child, as if he yet hung helpless at her bosom.”

“ Oh my poor mother !” said Eustace ; “ forbear : plead not for me, let me die !”

“ Who spoke ?” exclaimed Matilda, wildly : “ alive still ? Then there is hope, yes, yes, there is hope ; look upon him. Could you crush him ? Why I would not hurt the poor earth-worm

that crawled in my path; and can you murder the orphan, the widow's last and only hope? But no, you cannot, you dare not do the deed. Men though they have a bad spirit, are not fiends whilst yet they walk the earth. Spare him, then, spare him! I will kneel to you, I will call on Heaven day and night to bless you, so you but spare my child."

"Once more," said Armagnac, "leave me, or force shall tear you from me; it is in vain to plead!"

"To you it is in vain to plead," replied Matilda, "for you have never known what 'tis to call a living creature child. Wolves, lions, the fiercest and most savage of the brutal herd, have yet some feeling for their kind, but you have none. You look like marble, that nothing can change from its cold aspect. Then hear me; I will kneel and curse you. Nay, mock me not; a mother's curse is terrible; it is a fearful thing. It shall speak to your heart by day; it shall haunt you in the night, and the bad spirit of a mind disturbed shall howl it to you in your

dying hour. Look on him, Heaven ! make this wretched man to linger through a life of agony, and die blaspheming ; let his days—”

“ I will hear no more,” said Armagnac : “ hark thee, warder ; when the bell of the eastern turret strikes the hour to set the watch, then lead that youth to death ! Bring me his head, or your own shall answer for it. See it be done ; till then I leave you.”

Armagnac quitted the dungeon, whilst the wretched and frantic Matilda yet invoked curses upon him, till nearly fainting, and exhausted from the supernatural energy of her own feelings, she burst into a flood of tears, as she lay on the ground, with her head reclining in the arms of her son. The keeper of the prison was for some time speechless. At length he advanced to Eustace, and throwing himself on his knees before him, he begged his forgiveness for what his duty must oblige him to perform. Eustace not only granted the pardon the man desired, but thanked him for the feelings of humanity he had shown for his distress.

The keeper then ventured to say, “ that Eu-

stace had better summon resolution to quit the dungeon immediately, before his mother recovered strength sufficient to make her capable of such another expression of passionate sorrow as that they had just witnessed. Matilda, although nearly exhausted, was attentive to the least sound that passed their lips; and once more starting up, she turned towards the keeper, and motioned with her hand he should draw near. "Come hither, man," she said; "are not you the keeper of this dungeon?"

"Yes, lady," replied the man, "it is my lot, but not my will, to hold the office."

"Ay," said Matilda, "I remember; you have a child, a sick child; I left it but now. Oh it is very sick! How the poor thing looked in my face as I knelt by it, as if to ask me to give it ease, but I could not. Its eyes were glassy, and its head hung over its pretty shoulder, like a flower broken on its stem. Its little hands were cold too, all cold and clammy; but yet there was a pulse, yes, a pulse still. Would you save that child?"

"Would I save my child?" said the man, who

wiped with his rough hand the tears that wetted a father's cheek; "Oh! I would save him, lady, if I could!"

"Why, then, save mine," exclaimed Matilda, "and Heaven will show you mercy! I know it will; your child shall live to bless you. I will watch it, nurse it: the poor thing has no mother. Save but my Eustace, and Heaven will spare the little sufferer!"

"If my life could save your son, lady," said the keeper, "I would risk it; but beyond this tower I have not one key of the castle. Your son would leave the dungeon only, perhaps, to meet a swifter death in the court-yard; for my lord has some about him who would not scruple——They laugh at mercy."

"They do, they do!" replied Matilda mournfully, "all hope I see is vain. Leave us then, gaoler, thou man of harder name than heart; but lead him not to—I cannot say the word—take him not from me till the last lingering moment of his fate. We will try to pray together, for I am very faint, and I would fain employ this hour as I ought."

The man promised to fulfil this request, and retired. When he was gone, Eustace looked upon the countenance of his mother with filial piety: he was shocked to observe its altered expression. All her energy had passed away. The livid whiteness had settled again upon her cheek and lip. Her eye was humid, and a slight convulsive throb every now and then moved in her throat. She sank upon the straw, unable longer to support herself.

“My mother,” said Eustace, “you are faint and ill; let me call the keeper back, he may give you aid.” Eustace flew to the door: it was barred without; he knocked violently, he called aloud, but no one heard his call. “O Heaven!” cried Eustace, “she will perish for want of help! Here, drink this water, it is all I have within the dungeon; all that a wretched son can offer to his mother!”

“No:” said Matilda, “I shall be well, very well, presently; but—but I am faint and chilled now: it is cold, very cold. Where are you?”

“Gracious Heaven!” exclaimed Eustace, “I am at your side.”

“Then I will kneel,” said Matilda, “and you shall forgive and bless me.”

“Forgive!” cried Eustace, “I have nothing to forgive you. But oh! kneel not to me, do not mock me, my dear mother; you must not kneel to me. No! here let me humbly beg your blessing, at your feet. We shall meet again, with my dear father, in a better world!”

“You have my blessing,” answered Matilda; “but shall we meet again? I hope so; but I have thought more of vengeance than of Heaven. See how I am punished! my vengeance has turned upon myself. It has brought you to this dungeon and to death.”

“No, my mother,” said Eustace, “it has not. Think not thus: Heaven will have pity on your sorrows, and forgive your errors. But why, why do you speak thus?”

“I am sick, Eustace, very sick,” answered Matilda, “and this dark hour has been too much for my weak brain. The bell will strike soon: it will be my knell as well as yours. Eustace, I am dying.”

“Dying!” exclaimed Eustace, who seemed

to forget his own situation in the apprehension for his mother; "Say not so, my mother: live for my sake. Oh! let us not part thus!"

"It may not be," replied Matilda faintly. "Where are you? my sight is dizzy. Give me your hand: how cold it is; I will warm it in my heart. Kiss me, Eustace; again—another. I have often kissed those lips when they slumbered on my bosom. Now place my head upon your breast, there I will breathe my last. Pray for me—my thoughts are wild and wandering; I can but say, God bless you!"

Eustace, in an agony of grief, held his mother in his arms, threw his mantle around her, chafed her hands, and tried to keep up vital warmth by pressing her close to his bosom; but it was all in vain. The sudden shock upon discovering her son whilst thus under sentence of death; the violent energy she had exerted during the scene with Armagnac, and her despair of saving Eustace, had altogether been too much for the weak frame and agitated mind of poor Lady Matilda. Since the murder of her husband she had been frequently visited with attacks of

frenzy, and they were generally followed by a crisis of danger to her health. This last access was fatal.

Eustace felt convinced his mother was dying; no human aid was nigh; he committed her to the protection of Heaven, and endeavouring to compose her last moments, he prayed as fervently and as connectedly as his feelings would let him in such an hour of suffering. His prayer was ended, the Lady Matilda still lay in his arms, gasping for breath; her eyes fixed and watery, almost unconscious of any object of vision; her hands cold, yet still pressed within one of her son's. She raised her head, and blessed him once more. She started again, convulsive movements stirred her hands and feet, and she played with her fingers, with the mantle of Eustace, and again they were motionless. "Where are you?" she faintly exclaimed. "Cover me, I am cold; yet closer, closer—so now, all is over—they have taken him away from me; but I come, De Bearn, I come—my husband, my son—save him! save him!--Not dead yet? Oh, do not torture him! kill him, and take me too!

Oh, Eustace ! bless—bless my child !” Some wandering thought had thus disturbed the mind of the poor sufferer, who, quite worn out and exhausted, fainted in the arms of the child upon whom she bestowed her last blessing ; and in a few moments she heaved a gentle sigh, and expired.

For some time Eustace sat as motionless as the image of death before him. He did not shed one tear. He held the body of his mother in his arms, and still unwilling to believe her dead, he again vainly attempted to reanimate the lifeless corpse. He breathed on her hands, and put them into his bosom, holding her as a mother would the infant she nursed in her arms.

After a time he laid her gently down upon the straw, and clasping his hands together, he looked upon the corpse with the fixed expression of despair. “ Life may yet linger,” said Eustace, “ I will try if there is breath.” And taking up a piece of the straw that lay on the ground, he put it upon her cold lips, whilst he threw himself down by the side of the body, and placed his hand upon the heart. The eye of Eustace

was fixed upon the straw ; he moved not, he listened, he scarcely breathed ; but all was still. No pulsation beat against his hand ; the straw stirred not upon the cold lips. She was a corpse. Eustace, no longer deceived, started from the ground, and gave way to an almost frantic burst of sorrow. “ No, no, no,” he cried, “ there is no life ; she is dead, dead, quite dead. My mother ! my dear, my unhappy mother ! dead, killed : De Foix has killed us all. Oh my father ! if thy spirit can look down from seats of blessedness, now visit thy wretched son, calm his mind in this last hour of life, and teach him patience to meet death in the hope to share eternity with a mother and with thee.”

Scarcely had Eustace pronounced these words, when he heard a deep and hollow sound below the floor of his dungeon. He started : a superstitious terror rushed through his mind and possessed his spirit. The sound was repeated, and, with a loud noise, one of the large and square stones, that formed the flooring of the dungeon, suddenly dropt down. Eustace turned his head towards the spot : he perceived the termination

of a flight of steps, at the top of the opening which was thus exposed. But what was his amazement, when, in another instant, the august stranger, who had appeared in the lists of the tournament at Orthes, and at the banquet of De Foix, stood fully armed before him ! The visor was raised, and the countenance that appeared beneath it exactly resembled that which Eustace had observed in the effigy of his late father, on the night of the vigil of arms.

Eustace stood gazing upon the armed figure, with feelings of awe and astonishment. He essayed to speak, but the sounds died away upon his lips before he could give them utterance. The stranger advanced a few steps, and looking upon Eustace, he said, “ Be not alarmed; I am John de Bearn. A boy who lately left this castle, where Armagnac had held him as a prisoner, told me of your danger, and that you were confined within *the dungeon of the eastern tower*. The knowledge of this circumstance enabled me to give you liberty. I entered this vault to save you. Follow me then ! lose not a moment ! we will join our people at Lourde, and prepare

to attack the castle. Armagnac shall fall; and then, Eustace, you shall be the avenger of a noble house against De Foix. You shall know who was your father: a mother's arms shall still press you to her bosom."

"No," said Eustace, "that can never be. Look down, look upon this sight; it will break your heart with sorrow. She is dead, quite dead, cold, cold and lifeless."

An exclamation of grief and surprise burst from the lips of John de Bearn as he looked down, and for the first time beheld the lifeless form of the unfortunate Matilda extended upon the straw, and every limb and feature settled into the motionless stiffness of death. "What is this?" he hastily exclaimed, "how came she hither? has Armagnac dared to——but we will avenge her! Thou sweet and blighted flower—Oh my poor sister! but no, I will not shed a tear till I have avenged thee on thy murderers; and then we will sorrow for thee till memory shall be no more: for thou wast so good, so gracious in thy nature,—thou hadst in thy mind all that is sweet in woman, with whatever is

noble in man. Farewell, my sister!" (continued De Bearn, as he bent down and kissed the pale cheek of the corpse) "farewell; I go to save thy son. Eustace, follow me, we must pass this subterraneous passage: haste to be gone."

"Come then," said Eustace, as he stooped down and lifted the body of his mother in his arms: "now I follow you."

"Put down the corpse," said John de Bearn. Eustace shuddered at the word; he murmured, as he kissed his mother's cold cheek, "Ay, corpse indeed. My lips have kissed thee, and the flesh is dented in; it springs not up again from the touch. Oh death is a very fearful thing to look upon."

"Nay, put her down," said John de Bearn, "or we may both be lost; she is beyond the reach of human succour. This is but her clay, her house; the spirit that was its tenant is fled for ever. Haste, then, leave this place, and avenge your mother in death if she was dear to you in life."

"What!" replied Eustace, "and leave her honoured clay to be the scoff of hard-hearted

wretches, that never knew one feeling worthy of a creature of God's work? No, I cannot do it."

"Nay but you must," said John de Bearu: "place her gently down, cast your mantle upon the body. We go to avenge her; we will succeed, or perish; ere to-morrow at this hour the castle shall be ours. Then we will give her an honourable sepulchre. You cannot make speed through the subterraneous passage to escape to the wood, where it terminates, should you attempt to remove my poor sister's body. Leave it for a time, and let us hasten to the work of vengeance."

"Well, then," replied Eustace, "necessity, and not my heart, consents to leave her. I will but lay her cross upon her bosom, it has fallen to the ground. One kiss more, my mother. The mantle upon her face, so now farewell; farewell my dearest, my unhappy mother. A son goes to avenge your wrongs: he will return either to lay thee in an honoured grave, or to fall near thee."

John de Bearu hastened Eustace from a scene

so dreadful. They descended the winding steps, closed the falling door (whose spring was understood by John de Bearn) after them, and taking up the torch which he had left burning in the vault beneath, with some difficulty they made their way through the subterraneous passage, which was about half a league in extent. At length they gained egress by what had the appearance of a natural fissure in a rock, that opened upon a wood; and there they found waiting for them two faithful adherents, whom John de Bearn had brought with him, and stationed to guard the entrance, in order to secure their retreat.

The means by which John de Bearn thus preserved his nephew may be briefly explained. Many of the feudal castles, of this period, had constructed within them some secret vault, connected with a subterraneous passage, that led a considerable distance from the fortress. The entrance to these vaults, or passages, was generally constructed by a flat stone, formed to look like a portion of the flooring, and to fall like a trap door. This entrance was often placed in the flooring of one of the dungeons of the castle,

the better to conceal it from either suspicion or detection. Such a passage existed in the castle now inhabited by Armagnac ; its entrance was within the dungeon of the eastern tower, and it terminated as before-mentioned by a fissure rudely cut in a rock, and well concealed without by briars and trees in the midst of a thick wood, not far distant from the direct road to Lourde.

John de Bearn once possessed this castle ; he was acquainted with the whole mystery of the subterraneous passage ; but doubting the good faith of Armagnac, who was then his ally, he did *not* communicate to him the important secret of this passage, when he afterwards sold to him this castle ; and he kept the knowledge of it equally secret from Le Mengeant.

When, therefore, Will of the West stated that Eustace had been thrown into the dungeon of the eastern tower of Armagnac's castle, and sentenced to die, De Bearn resolved to lose not a moment in attempting his preservation. His forces were not then entirely collected, nor sufficiently strong to attempt to surprise such a well-manned and vigilant garrison as that of the Lord of Armag-

nac; he therefore left Le Mengeant and his papers in the care of the Count de Montpensier, and set forward with only two faithful adherents, as secretly as possible, to endeavour to liberate his nephew.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EMBASSY.

Hang out our banners on the outward walls.—
The cry is still, *they come!* Our castle's strength
Will laugh a siege to scorn : here let them lie
Till famine, and the ague, eat them up :
Were they not forc'd with those that should be ours,
We might have met them dareful, beard to beard,
And beat them backward home.

SHAKSPEARE.

IN consequence of the active measures taken by the Count de Foix to commence the siege he had meditated upon the castle of the Lord of Armagnac, the day following that on which Eustace had escaped from the dungeon the interior of the fortress seemed unusually confused and disturbed.

Astonished at finding the body of Matilda dead within the dungeon, and Eustace gone, without the slightest visible trace of the means by which he had escaped (for the door of his

prison had been found locked, barred, and bolted), Armagnac began to suspect he must have some traitors within his castle; he, therefore, caused the gaoler of the tower to be closely confined within the dungeon of the keep, as he believed, notwithstanding the man's assertions to the contrary, that he was in some measure privy to the escape of Eustace, and resolved, so soon as he should find leisure, to compel the gaoler, by torture, to make confession. At the present moment, lost in conjecture respecting this mysterious affair; surrounded by his foes without, and the castle filled with tumult within, Armagnac had neither composure nor leisure sufficient to allow him to enter upon investigation; for the present, therefore, he caused the body of Matilda to remain where it had been found, lest he should be suspected of her death, by some of those few honourable knights who happened to be in his service, to whom he expressed his sorrow for her sudden and extraordinary decease, and his determination to have the matter investigated as soon as his affairs would admit the opportunity.

Isabel de Greilly was still a prisoner, and confined within the range of a few apartments, in the upper stories of the eastern tower. Jane of Boulogne was still pent within a small room of these apartments, where, it had been given out, by the Lady Matilda, the page lay grievously sick. Fortunately for these captives, the Lord of Armagnac was too much busied at the present time to think about them; and contenting himself with giving orders, that the tower in which they were confined should be strictly guarded, he left Isabel and the supposed sick page to the care of an ancient dame, who had long served in the castle. This woman was both feeble and deaf, and did little more than supply the apartments of her prisoners with food, and such things as were daily wanted.

When the Lady Matilda no longer appeared, Isabel feared some foul play had been practised against her; but she endeavoured to stifle these apprehensions in her anxious desire still to conceal Jane of Boulogne from detection. This was accomplished by letting fall the hangings before the narrow window of her small apart-

ment; and as the approach of their aged attendant was always announced by a slow step, and the falling of bolts and bars, Jane had constantly sufficient notice to have time enough to throw herself upon a couch, where, half smothered with coverchiefs and linen, she passed off for the sick page, without exciting the suspicion of the woman. A thousand other little arts and devices were practised by these unfortunate damsels, in order to secure the Lady Jane; for the fear of death is a great sharpener of the wits, and there is no saying more true than that necessity is the mother of invention.

Whilst these devices were going forward in the eastern tower, Armagnac was busied in visiting every part of the walls, towers, and ramparts of his castle, to see that all was in a state of preparation to resist an attack. Here, were persons pressing forward to the ramparts with large stones, in order that they might be in readiness to be hurled down on whomsoever should attempt to scale the walls. The portcullis was examined, so that it might in an instant be let fall if necessary. Stones were also placed in readiness to be

thrown down through the machicolations of the gateway, and every thing was prepared, so that hot lime and molten lead might be poured upon the enemy in the same manner. A double-guard was placed within the barbican; each arbalister and archer, or cross and long bow-man, was appointed to his post. Some of these were to be stationed on the ramparts; and others were placed at every loop-hole throughout the fortress, whence they might aim their arrows at the besiegers. The bells of all the churches in the town were directed to be set a ringing at a particular signal, to give the general alarm, in case of an attack. Almost all the women, children, and aged men within the castle were sent out, and placed in a neighbouring monastery for security.

Armagnac hastened from one quarter to another, and as he was directing his own banner to be unfurled, and displayed upon the turrets of the castle-keep, his nephew, the young Lord D'Albreth, half breathless with speed, advanced towards him. "What news?" inquired Armagnac, "what news? are the scouts returned?"

“They are,” replied D’Albreth; “but one of them ventured too far, and is a prisoner.”

“To whom?” inquired the uncle.

“To De Foix,” was the answer.

“To De Foix!” exclaimed Armagnac, with surprise, “is he so near us?”

“He is, indeed,” said D’Albreth; “he is even now encamped not more than half a league from this castle. He marched thither with a strong body of men at arms during the night; but this is not the worst news.”

“Then tell the worst,” answered Armagnac, “and quickly; let me know it.”

“Our scouts,” said the nephew, “fell in with a man, who, they say, they are certain was a miner, and that he wore the badge of De Foix; from this man they could learn nothing, excepting that he had been for some weeks in the neighbourhood, and presently they saw three or four more of the same people issue from a spot encompassed with wood, near the camp of De Foix: they would have examined farther, but they dared not; for several men, although not

attired as soldiers, yet armed, appeared fixed, and cautiously watching at intervals near the spot."

"So, then," said Armagnac, "you would frighten me with the supposition that De Foix has set his old moles to work again, and that he has been undermining our castle: Impossible! Have I not kept thee on the alert, scouring the country round; and do you think that nothing of this mine would have become known to us ere this? No, no; the Count is fox enough, but he cannot burrow so near my den without my knowledge. What is thy next piece of wondrous intelligence? but see that it smacks something more of probability; bring me not the fool's tale of a lying scout."

"You may hold what I report in contempt or not, my lord, as you please," answered D'Albreth, somewhat haughtily; "yet, ere long, you may need my utmost aid, and counsel too. I have other news."

"Well, speak it then," said Armagnac; "I am pestered with many things, and I cannot

watch my words, to catch those that may best please a ceremonious ear. Haste to tell me."

"John, Count de Montpensier, son of the Duke de Berry, is bringing up a force against you," said the nephew.

"Against me!" exclaimed Armagnac, "on what pretext?"

"First," replied D'Albreth, "because, at the late tournament of Orthes, he vowed to espouse the cause of Jane of Boulogne; and, secondly, by the late treaty, you have become liegeman to England in its right of Aquitaine, instead of France, where your ancient homage was paid."

"Indeed!" cried Armagnac, "but there, D'Albreth, you share with me; for by that treaty you are equally a liegeman to Richard of England, the son of the Black Prince."

"I know it," said D'Albreth, "and I will stand by you; we will resist, or fall together. Yet remember your promise; my service loyally paid to you, and Isabel de Greilly is to be given into my hands, as my affianced bride."

“ I know it was a promise,” replied Armagnac, “ you shall have her.”

“ Where have you bestowed her then ?” inquired the nephew : “ is she in honourable ward, with none of your wantons, and your gay young squires about her ? Is she, as you promised, in safe and honourable keeping ? I must be satisfied of that before I draw my sword in your service.”

“ She is held in all honour,” said Armagnac ; “ I tell you once more, that no one but old Catherine, who nursed thee, can get near her ; and I keep the keys that confine her within the chambers of the eastern tower.”

“ It is well,” answered D’Albreth, “ then you may depend on me ; I will support you to the last : but my news is not yet all told ; John de Bearn has certainly formed a league with De Montpensier against you. Your foes crowd around you on every side.”

“ John de Bearn leagued with De Montpensier !” said Armagnac, “ he will next, I suppose, stomach his vengeance, and so league with De Foix himself.”

“ No,” replied D’Albreth, “ I do not think

that to be probable ; they are now all combined against you, under various pretexts, as against the common enemy ; but were you once subdued, I fancy John de Bearn would fall to as heartily as ever against De Foix ; it is but the fear of weakening his forces by having two enemies to contend with at the same time, which now makes him observe the truce with De Foix."

" I heed him not," said Armagnac ; " for I have bought Le Mengeant's aid with large sums of gold. This castle is well manned, well armed, and strongly defended ; and would but Le Mengeant bring up his men to reinforce us, we might laugh at our foes. Why comes he not ? it is extraordinary ; he promised to lead his men from Carcassone, and should have been here ere this. Do you, D'Albreth, see that our treasure, with all that is most valuable in the castle, be removed to the keep ; examine every corner of it well, and look that it be double guarded and armed ; that is our surest hold."

" Should not, then, the Lady Isabel be there removed ?" inquired D'Albreth ; " she is worth all your treasure."

“What!” said Armagnac, “would you, who are so chary of her, expose her to the gaze of the knights and squires who throng the keep, and daily revel in its hall. No, if it be necessary, I will myself hereafter remove her thither; for the present let her remain where she is. Haste you to fulfil my orders.”

D’Albreth departed; and scarcely was he gone when a varlet approached Armagnac, and told him that a pilgrim, worn with travel, was without the gates, and demanded instant admission, and to speak with the lord of the castle. “A pilgrim!” said Armagnac, surprised; but he added, as if recollecting himself, “give him admission, and carry him into my own private chamber; but see that the wicket be only opened to let him pass: yet stay, have you demanded if he has the pass word, or if he brings a token from Le Meneant? the warder knows the token of our allies. Did the pilgrim show that?”

“No,” replied the varlet, “the pilgrim, my lord, said, he would send the token but to you, and did not show it.”

“Go bring it hither, then,” answered Ar-

magnac, "and open not the wicket till this be done." The varlet obeyed, and soon returned with a hunting knife in his hand, which he presented to Armagnac, as the token the pilgrim had offered through the grating at the wicket. "It is right," said the lord; "conduct the bearer of that knife to my private chamber."

The lord of the castle hastened to receive the messenger of Le Meneant, anxious to learn the fate of Jane of Boulogne, and when the robber captain might be expected to join him with his forces. Yet there was always a lurking suspicion about Armagnac of every person who came near him: for men who are incapable of acting from principle themselves are generally prone to be suspicious of others; and with all the inconsistency of a mind that acts from the impulse of selfish and passionate feelings, the Lord of Armagnac would often suspect a person this hour, to whose hands he would in the next, confide the execution of the most deep and dangerous plan. Such was his inconsistency; he therefore now stepped behind a canopy that stood upon the dais in the chamber, in order to

observe the pilgrim before he advanced to speak to him.

A man of the middle stature, dressed in the garb of a pilgrim, entered the room ; but so far from appearing to be, as he had stated, worn by travel, he walked with a free and firm step, and seemed anxious to be rid of the hood that enveloped his head and face ; for no sooner was the varlet departed the chamber, than he threw it back, and displayed the hardy and sun-burnt features of a man who looked more like a soldier than a holy devotee. “ It is right,” thought Armagnac ; “ this is one of Le Mengeant’s own breed—a true wolf, I warrant him.” The lord of the castle then came forward, and hastily greeting the pilgrim, with as much assurance as he before had felt suspicion, he proceeded to inquire when Le Mengeant would bring up his force. “ And how will you men of Lourde,” continued he, “ like fighting with each other, if need must have it so ; for John de Bearn is against me, whilst Le Mengeant is for me ?”

“ We have often been so situated before now,” replied the pilgrim ; “ for John de Bearn

and Le Meneant never fight in concert, excepting when it is to defend Lourde, or to harass De Foix; and then, though they would have cut each other's throats the day before, they will fight side by side: there is no brotherhood else between their people. I have, ere this, dined with one of De Bearn's men to-day, and knocked out his brains to-morrow."

"And what," said Armagnac, as he returned from seeing that the door was close shut, "what of Jane of Boulogne? How has that affair sped?"

"Ill enough," answered the pilgrim; "but all may be yet amended; for I have brought a pilgrim's gown and hood for her too, from Lourde. She must away with me: I am prepared to do the business for you."

"Away with you!" said Armagnac: "why she left this castle with Le Meneant."

"No, she did not though," replied the pilgrim. "The lady Jane feared you purposed to harm her, to murder her in the Pyrenees, so she dressed up her page in woman's gear; and Le Meneant, though the best hawk that ever

pounced on the game, was deceived, and carried off a tom-tit instead of a heron. Jane of Boulogne is still within this castle."

"No wonder," cried Armagnac, "that the priests tell us all evil began with woman! Why, they are better than myself at a stratagem. So, then, the boy was let slip under the disguise of a petticoat and coverchief, and the lady remains lying on a couch, shut up as the page, dangerously sick, forsooth! But we will cure her—we will hunt her out. What plan does Le Mengeant purpose you should follow with her? We must mind how we deal with these women; for they are worse than the evil one himself in deceit, and slip us when we think we hold them sure."

"Le Mengeant would thus plan it," answered the pilgrim: "you must allow me access to the lady Jane, as if I were really what I seem to be, and I will pretend pity for her, and offer to get her out of this castle, in a habit like my own, by means of the warder, who I must declare to be an ancient comrade of mine. She will rejoice in the prospect of escape, and gladly go with

me ; do you give me but free access to her, and without the castle gates, and leave all the rest to me. Le Mengeant's men will take care to despatch her."

"It is an excellent stratagem," said Armagnac, "worthy of my own invention. You have but to show Le Mengeant's token, and any of the warders will let you pass: it is as well known to them as my own. But where do you mean to despatch her?"

"That must depend on circumstances," replied the pilgrim. "Do you know this dagger?"

"I do," said Armagnac; "I gave it to Le Mengeant."

"Then mark me," continued the pilgrim. "Two of my comrades wait in the wood hard by; thither shall I conduct the lady Jane; this dagger shall keep her silent, should she suspect my purpose. When I have joined my fellows, if we are undisturbed, we shall despatch her in the wood, and throw her body into the river; if not, we must conduct her to the Pyrenees, and cast her down the precipice."

"Better stab her in the wood, and sink her

body with some stones about it in the river," said Armagnac. "It is nearer, and more certain. But hark, who comes hither? I heard a trumpet."

"I must not be seen," said the pilgrim, as he drew his hood close round his head and face. "If I am seen with you, our plan is ruined."

"Step then behind the canopy," replied Armagnac; "you are one of my own people. I never yet knew a creature of Le Mengeant's that would betray a scheme, where blood was to be spilt. Stay there till I call you."

The Lord of Armagnac, having thus disposed of the pilgrim, turned towards the door. A squire entered the room, and ere he could speak, the Lord exclaimed, "Whence sounded that trumpet?" "A herald without the walls, who bears a flag of truce, sounded that trumpet," replied the esquire.

"And from whom comes the pale-faced standard?" inquired Armagnac.

"From the Count de Foix, my lord," said the esquire. "He has sent an embassy to hold parley with you."

"If the white ensign of his embassy were stained with the blood of De Foix," replied Armagnac, "he would be more welcome. What knight does the Count send as his ambassador?"

"No knight, my lord," replied the squire; "but a holy man, a prior, as I think, comes to parley with you as the embassy of De Foix."

"A holy man, a prior!" said Armagnac, sneeringly. "What! does De Foix think to shrive me, confess me, and so fool me to some measure for his own advantage? However, the embassy may freely pass. Give him entrance, and marshal him hither without delay."

The squire quitted the chamber, and soon after returned, conducting no less a person than Prior Philip, of the monastery of St. Mary, who came as the ambassador of De Foix.

"Leave us," said Armagnac to the attendant; "we will hear this reverend prior speak the counsel of De Foix alone."

"I come," said Philip, "from the most noble Gaston Phœbus, Count de Foix, who, wishing to spare your lives, and the effusion of human blood, offers to leave your persons free, with all

that is yours, on condition that you immediately surrender to him this castle, with certain prisoners he has learnt you keep confined within these walls; and that you also restore to the lady Jane of Boulogne her lands of Comminges."

"Name the prisoners the Count would have me surrender with my castle to him," replied Armagnac.

"They are," said the Prior, "the Lady Jane of Boulogne, Isabel de Greilly, a youth named Eustace, and a page of the court of Orthes."

"Then," answered Armagnac, "De Foix demands prisoners I do not hold within these walls: the youth named Eustace, and the page, are both at liberty."

"You must, nevertheless, surrender the damsels, with the castle," said Philip, "and the lands of the Lady Jane."

"And what is to be the penalty," inquired Armagnac, haughtily, "if I refuse to obey these demands of the Count de Foix? for I something question if he can enforce them."

"Should you refuse," replied Philip, "the Count will instantly commence the siege against

you; your ruin, your death, will be the certain consequence; for your castle, once taken, he is sworn not to spare *your* life."

"But my castle is strong, well defended, and is not yet taken," said Armagnac, "so tell De Foix; and there," he added, throwing down his gauntlet, "take him that with my defiance, and so ends your embassy."

The Prior, as he stooped to take up the gauntlet, cast an expressive glance on Armagnac. "You had better think again," said he. "I have been an ambassador to you before now, and you never yet found I gave you other than wise counsel; give me, therefore, present credit on the voucher of past faith: I advise you not to hold out the castle."

"Indeed!" said Armagnac, in a tone of voice which seemed to express curiosity mingled with suspicion; "there is something more in this: Prior, we know each other; we have dealt together before now; nay, start not at the word; we have dealt together; and the gold of Armagnac and of De Foix have helped to line thy coat with sables, whilst thou hast served the

Count, and yet been something useful to me. Come, let me buy thee now. What canst thou communicate? what intelligence? name the price."

The Prior looked around the room cautiously, but without speaking, yet in a manner as much as to say, "Are we alone?"

"There is nothing to fear," said Armagnac; "but come, shall I bribe you with a churchman's fee, with holy things? Should you like a cardinal's red hat, Prior? for there is like to be one empty soon, ready to drop upon thy reverend head: a word of mine will fix it there; for Clement of Avignon and I are now sworn friends, whilst his holiness is at bitter enmity with my Lord de Foix, because of the Count's quarrel with his cousin, the Bishop of Pamiers. Shall we have thee for the new cardinal? Come, give me this intelligence, and I will add to thy future hopes a thousand florins on the present hour."

The bribe was tempting. Philip had before, whilst serving the Count, tampered with his enemies; giving them, for a large bribe, just information sufficient to enable them to baffle the

plans of De Foix, yet without wholly betraying the Count, or putting his own reverend person into danger. Thus did the cunning Prior, by a refined treacherous policy, act falsely towards his master, under the character of an ambassador. "Well then," said Philip, "I accept the *terms*" (for he would not say I accept the *bribe*); "surrender on the instant, as you are required to do, and I will use my influence with the Count de Foix to restore to you this castle hereafter: you will be allowed to keep your treasure that is now within it; since the chief desire of De Foix is to regain the lands of Jane of Boulogne and the prisoners. If you hold out, you will perish ere night; for the Count has long been secretly preparing for this attack: you are *undermined*."

"Undermined!" exclaimed Armagnac; "where? which way? It is impossible!"

"It is true," answered Philip; "the Count has gained to his interest the abbot of a neighbouring house, within whose garden the mine was commenced; there have his people been at work; and the tower nearest to the gateway, that flanks the walls of your castle on the southern

side, stands at this moment but supported on piles of wood and oaken beams. The mine is filled with combustibles; the instant the train is fired that tower will fall in ruins to the ground: the men at arms of De Foix are in readiness; they will instantly enter by the breach thus formed, and put all your people to the sword; whilst you, in particular, they purpose to hang upon the keep of your own castle."

"And must I then surrender?" said Armagnac. "Is there no way left to save me? Prior, think again; I will double, nay treble, what I have promised thee in gold; and I will weary Pope Clement with my entreaty that he shall make thee a cardinal, so that thou wilt but think of some means to save me from an instant surrender."

"Yes," said the Prior, "there might be a means; but De Foix must never know it was by my suggestion; it must be your own work."

"It shall, it is," eagerly answered Armagnac: "in all our former dealings have I ever betrayed you to mortal creature? Save me but from a surrender, and had I the triple crown at my foot,

I would raise it to adorn thy brows, most reverend Philip."

"You must then, on the instant," said the Prior, "cause the Lady Jane to be placed within that tower which is undermined; then send me to her, and I will so state to her the extremity of the danger in which she stands, that she shall solicit me to return to the Count de Foix, and entreat him from herself *not* to destroy the tower under whose ruins she must perish. I am here as the Count's ambassador, and as such I may without suspicion demand this interview with your prisoner."

"You may! you may!" cried Armagnac, impatiently; "it shall be instantly done: if we can but delay the surrender, all is well, for Le Mengeant's people will speedily join us; they may destroy the mine. You have saved me from this surrender. Cardinal! did I say? Why, thy stratagem is worthy the Pope himself; he could not have devised a better. Here, reverend Prior, pass into this chamber; I will see to the instant removal of Jane of Boulogne to that tower; she shall be sent thither, whilst I bring thee the

gold: you will speedily hold a conference with her, and so return to the Count. You have saved this castle.”

The Lord of Armagnac hurried Philip into another chamber, promising to bring the gold; he then closed the door, and gently letting fall a bolt, secured the Prior. Armagnac returned towards the canopy, and said in a low but quick voice, “Come forth, pilgrim! come forth, thou saint of Lourde!” The pilgrim was in a moment by his side. “Friend,” continued Armagnac, “you have doubtless heard all that passed between me and that traitorous old Prior. He a cardinal!—he is a prince of villains! he would outdo all the consistory of Avignon itself in treachery and deceit. Hark you, I will not trust him for a moment, whilst he is in this castle; he may have deceived me. You shall attend him during this interview with the Lady Jane of Boulogne: watch him;—observe him;—if he deals falsely, stab him to the heart: I can excuse it to the Count, though he be an ambassador; for he has often betrayed De Foix’s plans to me.

For the present our necessities demand that we should spare Jane of Boulogne; hereafter we can despatch her. Here, take this key; it unlocks the tower which is undermined; there attend the Prior, and thither shall Jane of Boulogne be conducted. Obey me!—no words!—lose not a moment!—away! I must seek D'Albreth, who is in the keep: all things must be ready; for I see the storm about to burst upon me.”

Thus did the Lord of Armagnac, in his usual hurried manner, run on from one plan to another, from stratagem to intrigue, and from intrigue to stratagem, till he scarcely knew which of his manoeuvres to put first in execution; yet ever avaricious, even in the midst of danger, he paid Philip but half the promised sum of gold, declaring the remaining part he could not discharge on the instant, but would hereafter. Philip, although somewhat dissatisfied, nevertheless secured within his vest what was given to him; and after bargaining that an additional hundred florins should be added to what was still due, as

some compensation for the delay, he said he was now prepared to meet the Lady Jane of Boulogne in the tower.

This unfortunate woman, whose large inheritance, by exciting the cupidity of others, had caused all the miseries of her life—(a fate common to heiresses of the nineteenth as well as of the fourteenth century)—was torn from her faithful friend, and constant companion, Isabel, and hurried to the fatal tower, without any reason being assigned for her removal.

She felt but little reassured when she saw the Prior, and a person wrapt in the habit of a pilgrim, enter the chamber of her new habitation; and demanded of Philip by what means he had gained admission, and if he knew the cause of her being conducted to this particular spot?

“Alas! lady,” said the arch hypocrite, “I came hither as the ambassador of my Lord de Foix, to Armagnac, as this holy pilgrim, who I find is one of his train, and but newly returned from the shrine of St. Jago, can attest. I offered honourable terms on the part of the Count; but

Armagnac having discovered, by some unfortunate means, that *this very tower is undermined* by De Foix, to prevent his enemy casting it to the ground, he has caused you to be removed hither. I have thought of a means to save you, and, therefore, demanded this interview as the ambassador of the Count. You must entreat him through me not to set fire to the mine, as, should De Foix do so, you would inevitably perish in the ruins of the falling tower."

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed Jane of Boulogne, "is such a fate reserved for me? Yet could I think that by my death, Isabel de Greilly and Eustace, who I believe still lie imprisoned within a dungeon of this castle, could be saved, I would endeavour to arm my mind with fortitude, and trust in Heaven to become the willing sacrifice."

"It must not be," said the Prior; "you must not perish; no, I will return to the Count de Foix, and tell him of your danger: and, let me add, that it is your entreaty he would spare this tower for your sake, to save you from destruction."

“Do as you list,” said Jane of Boulogne, mournfully; “my life is of little worth; but I thank you, father, and I do believe you are desirous to save me.”

“To save you!” exclaimed Philip: “I would venture my own life, lady, freely to save yours: could I but give you liberty, I would gladly become the tenant of this dangerous tower in your stead!”

Whilst the Prior was thus vehemently expressing his anxiety to preserve the unfortunate lady he had entrapped, the pilgrim stood with his hand pressed upon his bosom underneath his gown: he now drew nearer, and suddenly rushing upon Philip, he grasped him by the throat with one hand, as he held a brandished dagger in the other, at the same moment exclaiming, “Then you shall do it; here shall you remain! Utter but one word, one cry, and it is your last! Nay, no struggling—you are a villain! a traitor! You have betrayed her hither! you have betrayed the Count!” Philip was about to speak, but the pilgrim instantly placed his dagger’s point before the mouth of the hypocrite. “Not a

word!" said the pilgrim, "one word, and by all the saints that thou hast ever mocked with thy prayers, it is thy last. What, art thou caught in thy own trap, my cunning Prior? Submit, and I will spare your life; resist, and you shall lie dead at my feet."

Whilst this scene was passing, as it were in a moment, Jane of Boulogne stood mute between surprise and alarm; but what was her astonishment and joy, when the hood of the supposed pilgrim falling back in his struggle with the Prior, the honest features of Agos de Guisfort, glowing with courage and resentment, met her view! She felt convinced there was treachery indeed, and that Agos was her preserver. The Prior recognised the bold esquire, and believing him capable of executing all his threats, he thought it better to submit and remain silent, as Agos had enjoined.

Agos lost not a moment's time. He took from his own person the cord with which his pilgrim's vest was girt, and bound the arms of the Prior so securely, that there was no chance of his being able to unloose these bonds. He then

bid Philip remain quiet, on pain of instant death; and, quitting the chamber, led Jane of Boulogne into an ante-room. There he locked and double locked the door of the apartment where the Prior was confined, for his better security. "Thanks to Armagnac," said Agos, "who trusted me with these keys. Fear not, noble Jane of Boulogne," added he, "yon Prior is a wretch, think not of him; he has betrayed De Foix. I will tell you all hereafter; for the present know but this: Le Mengeant, who was to have been your murderer, lies grievously ill at Lourde. I took advantage of his danger, and have gained some intelligence from him, with his token. In consequence of which, I came hither to save you. Lose not an instant; put on this pilgrim's habit; I brought it for you from Lourde. Take Le Mengeant's token, and now, whilst Armagnac is with D'Albreth in the Keep, go direct to the gates of the castle, show but that token to the warder, and he will let you pass. Then make all speed; gain the wood on the left of the castle; there the Count de Montpensier waits to receive you.

Lose no time; tell him to keep the ambuscade in readiness, and when he shall hear a blast on the horn, bid him advance, for then all will be prepared."

"But what," said Jane, "what will become of Isabel?"

"Fear not for her," replied Agos; "I have learned from Le Meneant, that Armagnac has no design against her life; it is you who are in danger."

"And why will you not fly with me, brave Agos?" inquired Jane. "The token, surely, would pass us both at the gates."

"It would," said Agos; "but my work is not yet done. Fear not for me; I have the means still to deceive Armagnac. You will not be missed; for he has given to my charge the keys of this tower, where I will keep the Prior secure; and in a few hours all will be our own. But haste, begone! Forget not my instructions. Remember De Montpensier must attend to the signal of the horn. Do you show the token to the warder, and you are safe. Farewell! Away!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SIEGE.

————— Arm, arm, and out,
If this, which he avouches, does appear,
There is no flying hence, nor tarrying here,
I'gin to be a-weary of the sun
And wish the estate of the world were now undone.
Ring the alarm bell—blow winds, come wrack,
At least we'll die with harness on our back.

SHAKSPEARE.

WHEN the Count de Foix had allowed what he deemed a sufficient space of time for the return of his embassy, and Prior Philip did not appear, he became equally astonished and enraged; as he doubted not Armagnac had laid violent hands upon the person of his ambassador. Such an outrage against all the received customs of war demanded the utmost penalty his resentment could inflict. Numerous were the scouts De Foix sent out to make inquiry, and various were the reports they brought back. For report,

though there be no substance to form even a shadow, still will fancy a shadow, as if from something of real existence; so, in the present case, notwithstanding no intelligence could be learned of Philip, excepting that he had been seen to enter within the castle gates, report would have it, that he was certainly detained as a prisoner by the Lord of Armagnac; and, with the help of her usual appendages, report also described the Prior as fettered hand and foot, and cast with all the other prisoners, and Jane of Boulogne to boot, within the dungeon of the keep of Armagnac's castle.

Reports were indeed far circulated in the camp of De Foix, repeated from mouth to mouth, and generally asserted by the retailer as coming from some one he knew, who knew them to be quite true. De Foix himself, at length, adopted the universal opinion; and the absence of the ambassador, a thing so extraordinary at such a time, certainly gave the appearance of truth to the supposition; so that, without the charge of a too easy credulity, the Count may be excused for the faith he placed in such continued reports.

De Foix therefore called a council, in which the circumstance was fully debated, with the premeditated plan of attack on the castle of Armagnac. It was resolved that four machines of war should be forthwith placed before the walls under a strong guard. These machines were towers, constructed of wood, and made to run on wheels, capable of holding a large band of archers and cross-bow men, who were to let fly their shafts, and thus pick off every man who might appear upon the ramparts of the besieged castle. Some of the council proposed a second embassy, but this was overruled by the majority; and who, it was objected, would venture to hold parley with such a man as Armagnac, when, contrary to the laws of nations, he had dared detain the sacred person of an ambassador?

It was also considered that by commencing hostilities so immediately, the treacherous lord might perhaps be induced to give freedom to the Prior, and offer terms. At least it was worth the trial, and the mine might be set burning (as by the destruction of the supporting beams the tower must fall) either before or after the ge-

neral assault. Sir Evan de Foix had been appointed to act as captain to the guard placed over the mine; and the conflagration, for it could hardly be termed an explosion, was to take place under his direction. Sir Evan, anxious to regain the person of the Lady Jane, and to set his ally the Prior at liberty, did not approve this delay. With his usual violence of temper, he was for beginning with the conflagration, and to march in at once through the breach, thus made, and take the castle sword in hand.

The Count, whose prudence was as distinguishing a mark of his character, as violence was that of his son's, resisted this counsel. He wished to spare the lives of whoever might be within that fated tower, and to gain possession of it before the breach was made for the general assault. De Foix therefore laid his commands upon Sir Evan, who reluctantly received them, that the mine was not to be set burning till he should himself issue the order. Sir Espaign du Lyon, the Lord of Corasse, and many other valiant and approved knights, all concurred in this measure, and together with De Foix proceeded to

plan, arrange, and direct the various measures necessary to be adopted in the first attack, which they agreed to commence towards night-fall, in the hope of surprising their enemy. Every man was ordered to be armed and prepared for the onset, to march forward when the word should be given; but before they proceeded to the actual investment of the castle, De Foix directed mass to be said throughout the camp, so that every one might partake the benefit of the general absolution.

Whilst these events were passing in the army of De Foix, the Lord of Armagnac was equally busied within his castle, and he had sufficient to do to prevent his finding a moment's leisure or repose; for the reinforcement of Le Mengeant did not appear. His men were dispirited and murmuring. D'Albreth looked grave, and spoke little; while Armagnac was everywhere; he went from post to post, almost from man to man, directing in one place, encouraging in another, promising large rewards to this knight, and knighthood to that squire, so that they would but stand by him in his extremity. For, like Macbeth, Armagnac had but one virtue, that of

personal courage ; and he was resolved to hold it out to the last. Whilst he was thus hurrying to and fro, from one quarter to another, he but once encountered the supposed pilgrim. He had scarcely time to question him : “ Where is the Lady Jane ? ” he said, hastily : “ is she secure ? have you locked and barred the tower that is undermined ? ”

“ I have,” answered the pilgrim briefly.

“ Where did you part with the Prior ? he is returned, is he not ? ” again inquired Armagnac.

“ I parted from him at the tower,” answered the disguised Agos de Guisfort.

“ There was no deceit then, all was true ? Where is Le Mengeant ? where are his people ? ” again inquired Armagnac, hurrying one question after another before the pilgrim could answer him. At this moment the lord was called off to consult with D’Albreth upon the most desirable point to place an espringal on the walls of the castle, a machine used for casting stones upon the besiegers, and sometimes on the besieged.

The pilgrim could only answer, “ Our people will be here ere night ; I will give you notice of

their approach; but where can I now find armour within your castle? for I may need it when I join their service."

"Go to the chapel," said Armagnac; "it is stocked with arms and armour; there case yourself."

"I will," answered the disguised Agos, "for these garments suit not the coming time."

The Lord of Armagnac quitted the supposed pilgrim, still believing him to be a faithful emissary of Le Mengeant, and the hardy esquire proceeded to arm himself within the chapel. There was about Agos de Guisfort, notwithstanding the rough exterior of his manners, a high-minded resolution of purpose, and a self-devotion in a good cause, that might be termed truly heroic. He knew the danger of his enterprise; he knew that the slightest circumstance might lead to his detection; that should Armagnac but doubt him (a thing which might reasonably be expected in a man so full at once of caprice and suspicion), he was lost; for should the lord of the castle but demand the return of the keys of the tower, and find Jane gone, and the Prior

a prisoner in her stead, Agos well knew his own death would instantly follow such a discovery ; but he had voluntarily both suggested and undertaken this dangerous enterprise, and he was resolved to carry it through, or to perish in the attempt ; he might be said to remain in the castle of Armagnac like Damocles, with the sword suspended by a hair above his head ; his only reliance for security could arise from the harassing occupations of the lord ; who, what with real business, and what with such as he made business, by suggesting a thousand needless stratagems, did not allow himself a moment's time for inquiry, or even for thought ; and it is somewhat extraordinary that a man, whose daily necessities even were almost obtained by stratagem and trick, should not suspect the like practice in others. But Armagnac believed himself unrivalled in the art ; and his excessive vanity induced him to look with contempt upon the probable issue of the plans of others, unless he was in some measure privy to them.

Yet, strong circumstances had helped to confirm the opinion of the trust he reposed in the

pilgrim, as an adherent of Le Mengeant; for it must be remembered, Agos had possessed himself not only of the token, but also of the dagger that belonged to the robber-captain; and the information that Jane of Boulogne was still within the castle, had been first communicated to the Lord of Armagnac by the pretended pilgrim. This was a strong proof of his being sent by Le Mengeant, and that he could be no friend to the Lady Jane; for who, that valued the treasure, would point out to the thief that it was still within his grasp? Armagnac therefore had, apparently, no real cause for suspicion; and he had not now leisure to fancy one, which, under less turbulent circumstances, it is probable he would have done. To this must be attributed the present safety of Agos, who, with perfect calmness, walked to the chapel and suited himself with armour, having about him none that was his own, excepting his squire's steel cap, which he had worn under that of the pilgrim, and which he still retained.

When Agos was completely accoutred, he hastened to the hall, bustled in amongst Armag-

nac's people, as if he belonged to them, and fixed himself by the side of the Lord d'Albreth. At the moment he entered, Armagnac stood at the upper end of a long table, where some of the knights and squires had partaken of a hasty repast; the lord held a golden cup extended in his hand; flagons of wine, and strong drinks filled the board, and a sort of tumult prevailed. "Come, my noble knights and brave esquires," said Armagnac, who seemed desirous to raise their spirits by exhilarating draughts, "come, let us say our mass before we fight: pledge me, friends; let us drink to the downfall of our enemies, and seek no absolution but such as we drain from the goblet that absolves all cares: I quaff this cup to the death of De Foix; to the downfall of our foes."

"To the death of De Foix! To the downfall of our foes!" thundered through the hall. "And now," continued Armagnac, "each man to his charge; let the watch be set, and a double guard placed at the barbican. Who is that man by your side, D'Albreth? he has not tasted of his cup." Agos immediately took the alarm; and

knowing that the least circumstance might betray him, he snatched up the goblet, and drained its contents to the last drop.

“Who is he?” again inquired Armagnac : “To what banner does he belong? Whom does he serve?”

Agos walked boldly up to Armagnac, and then said, in a low voice, “The fangs of the wolf show my service.”

“I understand you,” answered Armagnac—(for both *Le Meneant* and his people frequently were spoken of in Gascony by the name of the wolf, as denoting their savage and fierce character)—“but I did not know you,” continued the lord, “when thus accoutred, since you have cast your pilgrim’s slough. Whither go you? Are you not for the watch to-night?”

“Yes!” said Agos; “and I expect our friends ere dawn of day; they must be near at hand.”

D’Albreth now advanced, and demanded of the lord of the castle, what was to be the password for the night, that he might make it known amongst the guard? “The word!” said Armagnac: “why, we will have a word that

shall remind us of our friends and our allies ; let it therefore be, *The Wolf for Armagnac !*"

" Enough !" answered D'Albreth : " it shall be so." " I shall remember," said Agos—" *The Wolf for Armagnac !*"

" You will hold the watch, then, to-night, to give me the earliest notice of Le Meneant's arrival?" said the deceived lord to the ex-pilgrim.

" I shall," answered Agos : " my post had better be on the southern rampart, near the gateway, since that commands the road to Lourde."

" Let it be so, then," replied Armagnac : " D'Albreth shall know it. I will retire, in the hope to gain a few hours' rest, for I am spent with toil ; but give me the keys of the southern tower, I will first visit the Lady Jane."

" You had better rest now," said Agos, " whilst you may ; for the moment Le Meneant arrives, we must make a sally, and attack the vanguard of De Foix. If we conquer them, we may destroy the mine. Yet here are the keys of the southern tower, should you wish to visit it ere you rest."

Agos held the keys extended in his hand, and

offered them to the Lord of Armagnac. "If he takes them," thought Agos, "I am lost." It was a bold proffer, yet the very boldness of Agos saved him; for he offered the keys with a firm hand and an unchanged countenance. Armagnac had no suspicion; yet he replied, "I will take the keys, since you are for the watch; but I will rest now, and visit the lady Jane early in the morning. We need not at present fear the mine, as De Foix, long before this, must know she is confined within that very tower, under which he had burrowed. He would not destroy her. Have you seen her since she parted from that sanctified ambassador and arch-hypocrite?"

"I have," said Agos.

"And is she reconciled to her change?" inquired Armagnac. "Though her removal was hasty, yet the tower was in readiness, and well accommodated to receive her for the night: in the morning she shall have proper attendance."

"She is, I dare say, well reconciled to her change by this time," replied Agos.

"Well, I will see her in the morning," said

Armagnac. "The guard is leaving the hall for the night-watch; go you to your post. Farewell."

The reader may suppose the temper of mind in which Agos left the Lord of Armagnac. "Well," thought the bold esquire, "he *has* the keys. His mind may change; he may visit the tower ere he takes rest; and even should he delay till the morning, I am then certainly discovered. Yet I have saved a noble-hearted damsel. I am glad of it. Well, all my hope must rest on this night. If Eustace, if John de Bearn keep their appointment, if De Montpensier is ready with the ambuscade, I may be saved, and all is our own. Now to my post. I will be firm and vigilant, and trust the preservation of my life to him who hourly sustains it."

The watch was set, the tumult within the castle gradually subsided, and the silence of night succeeded, a silence alone interrupted by the clink of arms, or the word given to the watch by a passing man. The night was cloudy, and the moon now shot a pale and momentary gleam through the floating vapours that ob-

scured her light, as they parted and passed onwards. Again another dense mass of clouds enveloped her in darkness. Agos paced his round upon the southern rampart. He stopped, he listened, again he slowly walked on; but he heard no sounds, save the baying of the watchdog, and the cry, from time to time, of the guard who were stationed on the out-posts of De Foix's encampment. He looked towards the beacon-tower of Armagnac's castle. The beacon was lighted, as the intended guide for the reinforcement of Le Meneant, should it approach during the night, according to the expectation with which Agos had amused the Lord of Armagnac. Yet the beacon-light burnt but dimly; darkness still hovered round. "When the twilight of morning returns," thought Agos, "I must look upon it for the last time." He paused: "Unless," he again thought, "this youthful knight, this Eustace, keeps his word. Hark! surely I heard a sound." Agos stopped; he listened. "Yes, they are advancing; they are endeavouring to pass the moat; it must be the adventurers." Again he listened, and was convinced

they approached. "Thank God!" said Agos. "Now for our attempt: we must succeed or perish."

In consequence of the drought which had this summer prevailed through Gascony, during the extreme heats, the moat which surrounded the castle did not at this time contain more than three feet of water in depth, a circumstance that had not been overlooked by the enemies of Armagnac. The moat, therefore, was easily and silently passed by Eustace and the few determined men he brought with him. They were now advanced as far as below the southern wall on the inner side of the moat. Every thing relative to the plan had been previously concerted with Agos, who, should he succeed in getting stationed as the watch on the southern rampart, was to speak certain words also previously agreed upon, and to receive a concerted reply.

Agos heard the steps, although it was so dark he could not clearly distinguish the persons beneath the wall. He now, therefore, bent his head over the ramparts, and softly said, "Is the sword unsheathed?" "It is to do justice!"

answered a voice from below the walls. "Then fix and ascend," said Agos. A scaling-ladder, admirably constructed, and armed at the top as well as down the sides, with arrow-heads, so that it might fix and cling to the walls, was instantly elevated. Agos assisted in fixing it securely at the top: all was done in silence, and, in a short space of time, Eustace, followed by six brave and determined men, fully armed and appointed, scaled the walls, and stood by the side of Agos de Guisfort on the ramparts. "Where is John de Bearn?" inquired Agos. "He is," answered Eustace, "gone round to join the ambuscade. He could not enter the castle by the subterraneous passage, because the eastern tower stands so near the keep, and that is too strongly manned to hazard a surprise so near it. We might lose all by an attempt in that quarter."

"We must now," said Agos, "proceed then to secure the gateway. When we have done so, we must give the signal, and fall the draw-bridge."

"Yes," said Eustace; "De Montpensier and

John de Bearn will then advance with the ambuscade to the barbican, and ere an hour the castle may be our own. Let us hasten ; for, if I mistake not, the Count has gained some knowledge of our purpose, and a body of De Foix's people are also advancing to attempt a surprise, thinking it a favourable moment. Let us gain the day without their aid, since the sword that I draw against Armagnac, I must hereafter keep unsheathed till it has avenged the death of my father upon De Foix."

"Come, then," said Agos, "we will soon secure the watch at the gateway: we are eight men, they are but four. Yet let me first advance ; I know something of one of these men, and I think I can make him unbar the door of the guard-room, where he keeps the keys of the gates. I know his humour ; stand close by me, but be silent till the moment of execution. Look how bright the beacon now burns ; it is a good omen, let us hail it."

Agos, followed by Eustace, marched forward ; when they came to the extremity of the southern rampart, the watch there stationed demanded the

word. "*The Wolf for Armagnac*," said Agos. "Are you the round?" inquired the man. "Yes," said Agos. "You come, then, before your time?" observed the guard. "Yes," replied Agos, "to see that the watch is alert at every post: a time of danger observes not the punctilio of hours." "Pass, then," said the guard. Agos and his companions walked forward. At every post the word was demanded and given; and the watch never doubted but that they were the round who came thus unexpectedly before the usual time, in order to see that the men were vigilant upon their different posts. At length they stood before the door of the guard-room in the outer ward: this apartment was within one of the flanking towers of the gateway, and opened upon the space beneath the archway. Agos approached the door and listened: he found the men within were upon the alert, but drinking. Agos now ventured to strike upon the door with the haft of his sword. "Who is there? what would you?" said a voice within. "Open to me," answered Agos; "I am one of the round, and I bring a flagon of the best wine in Gaseony.

It is sent to you by my master, Jaques le Gris, the captain of the round, that you may watch the better. Jaques le Gris hath, you know, a store of good wine."

Agos now heard a low murmur of voices, as if of consultation, within. At length the same voice that spoke before demanded through the door the word; "Give the pass," said he, "and we will open to you, and drink Jaques le Gris's health out of his flagon of good wine."

"*The Wolf for Armagnac*," answered Agos. "The wolf shall pass, then," said the voice; and a bar was heard to fall, and a key to unlock within. Agos motioned his companions to advance; they stept up close to the door: Agos entered, and Eustace with his followers rushed in, and instantly closed the door, so that the alarm might not be given without. The struggle was but momentary; for the men within the guard-room had been taken by surprise whilst engaged in drinking the wine which Armagnac, in order to raise the spirits of his murmuring people, had caused to be somewhat imprudently distributed amongst them. During the short

struggle one of the guard was struck down, and lay stunned by the fall; two were wounded, and the fourth man they bound, and threatened with instant death, unless he would point out to them the different keys.

-Agos and Eustace obtained them, with the requisite knowledge of those which opened the gates, and those which gave access to the barbican. Agos took care to lock the door of the guard-room on the outside, to secure the discomfited guard; whilst Eustace and his companions unfastened the great gates, which they placed wide open: they then proceeded softly to lower the draw-bridge, crossed over, and Agos blew one single blast upon his horn. They next rushed forward to the barbican, and succeeded in unlocking the first gate; but here the guard had been doubled on the previous evening, and a hot contest ensued. Eustace, Agos, and their companions, fought like desperate men, well knowing that as retreat was certain destruction, they must make good this hold. Whilst they were yet fiercely engaged, the trampling of horses was heard advancing on that side the

barbican which faced the country near the wood. “It is the ambuscade,” said Eustace: “yield, or you all perish by our swords!”

In the next moment the cry of “Our lady for De Montpensier!” “De Bearn to the rescue!” met their ear; and the young Count of France and his followers dismounted from their horses, burst the outer gate of the barbican, and rushing in to the assistance of their friends, overpowered the guard. By this time the alarm had been given in the castle, where the utmost tumult and consternation prevailed. The alarum-bell rang in loud and continued peals; bugles and trumpets joined their clangour to give the alarm: all was confusion. Men hastening, some to put on their armour, others to snatch a sword or an axe. The beacon blazed high, whilst its broad red light seemed now to shine brightly but to make the scene of general consternation more visible. “We are betrayed!” “A surprise!” “To arms!” “Raise the drawbridge!” “Fall the portcullis!” were cries that were heard mingling with the confusion of sounds. Whilst Armagnac ran like a madman backwards and forwards,

scarcely knowing what he did, yet armed as the night before, for he had not entirely thrown off his accoutrements; and D'Albreth, the most cool and collected captain within the fortress, gathered his people in all haste, and resolved to make a stand near the keep, so as to secure that, should the outer ballium be taken; a thing which seemed inevitable.

De Montpensier, Eustace, and John de Bearn, headed by Agos de Guisfort, after leaving a sufficient number of men to keep possession of the barbican, advanced with their followers towards the gates; but the drawbridge was raised by the order of D'Albreth, and their immediate entrance was thus cut off, else the garrison, overpowered by so sudden an attempt, must have instantly surrendered. The besiegers came prepared for all extremities, and placing their scaling-ladders against the walls, they held their shields over their heads, and mounted sword in hand. By this time the ramparts were manned, and sharp was the contest that ensued. Some of the besiegers were knocked down the moment they reached the summit of the walls; others there

struggled with their enemy, and both together fell over the battlements to the ground: the forces of Armagnac had undoubtedly the advantage of situation; still they were weakened by separation; for the party of De Foix, finding an attack was actually commenced on Armagnac, seized the opportunity when his forces must be weakened by having to contend with more than one party, and lost no time, but proceeded to storm the castle on the opposite side. Notwithstanding the superiority of their numbers, they found the task more difficult than they at first expected; for D'Albreth was an admirable commander, and possessed to an eminent degree that cool resolution, and decisive purpose, so necessary in peril; whilst Armagnac, to whom fear was unknown, had a determined and desperate courage, which animated others in the hour of extremity, and would never yield but to death.

We shall not here attempt a full description of the engagement which followed: from the nature of the warfare of the period it was protracted, terrible, and bloody. On the night of the storming the castle of the lord of Armagnac,

many were the lives lost on either side in the fray ; many were the general and individual contests. Prisoners were made, and prisoners were rescued, on both sides. A tower was taken, regained, and retaken ; and a point of advantage hotly contested. Still the donjon held out ; and whilst all around was confusion and carnage, its gray and majestic turrets reared their summits above the surrounding towers, above the incensed and contending multitude ; and when the first pale rays of the morning light gleamed upon its yet unconquered walls, it seemed to stand aloof, like the refuge of hope, and still to offer security in its impregnable and massive strength. “ To the keep ! to the keep ! ” was re-echoed from mouth to mouth throughout the forces of Armagnac ; and they now fought as desperately to gain the keep for their retreat, as they had before to secure victory.

Whilst the keep had become the general object of attention, both with the besieged and the besiegers, a hollow and deep sound was heard below the surface of the earth ; the very ground seemed to tremble as with an earth-

quake. But what was the general consternation, when, with one loud and tremendous roar, as if the combined thunders of Heaven shook the air, and with a terrible and dreadful crash, the huge structure of the southern tower opened its massive sides, burst asunder, and fell in a mighty ruin to the ground. The flames blazed high from the spot, and casting their long streams of fire in every direction as they were swayed by the eddy of the winds, the general conflagration of the whole castle seemed inevitable. Many, not only of the besieged, but also of the besiegers, were killed by the fall of the tower, and buried beneath its ruins; others were knocked down or slain by the large stones that had been as it were torn from its walls, and cast around.

Whilst the tower thus yawned asunder and fell to the ground, Armagnac for a moment paused. Desperation had quelled all the lighter follies and the uncertainty of his character; nothing but a determined courage was left: and with an unchanged countenance he turned to D'Albreth, and said, "We may yet gain the keep as an honourable refuge, unless you choose first to

attempt securing Isabel; she is still in the *Eastern* tower; the enemy have not yet possession of it; secure her, and we may make better terms with De Foix; for Jane of Boulogne must have perished." D'Albreth staid not another moment, but followed by his people, he made for the Eastern tower.

Resolved in his own mind to avail himself of the confusion which prevailed, and at all events to possess Isabel de Greilly, "I may," thought D'Albreth, "escape with her in these moments of confusion and tumult from the castle. If Armagnac fails, I can then force her to be mine; and if he succeeds, I can hold her by his plighted word: at all events she will be within my own power, which is better than trusting to Armagnac's hollow promise."

Isabel, who, it will be remembered, was still a prisoner within the *Eastern* tower, heard from her chamber the dreadful confusion that prevailed; she there felt the shock occasioned by the conflagration of the mine, and saw from her window the fury of the spreading flames which threatened

every part of the castle (excepting the donjon, that stood on a mound alone) with destruction.

Alarmed at the idea of being burnt alive in the tower where she was confined, Isabel flew towards the door, and violently knocked against it, imploring the aged woman who was her gaoler for God's sake to unbar the door; but no answer was made; and she now suspected that the woman, affrighted for her own safety, must have quitted the place, without thinking of her captive who was still within it.

Isabel redoubled her cries and her efforts. At length she heard footsteps advancing. "Thank God!" she said, "there is some succour at hand." In the next moment several violent blows were made upon the door; it burst open, and D'Albreth entered the chamber, attended by his people. Isabel turned towards him with clasped hands, and implored him to save her. "Save thee!" exclaimed D'Albreth, "ay, with my own life! I came to save thee, thou dearest object of my love! Now thou art mine for ever!" With these words he boldly seized on Isabel, and

carried her affrighted in his arms from the chamber. She now plainly saw that she was but saved from death perhaps for a worse fate. Terrified with the apprehension, and scarcely knowing what she did, or whither he was bearing her, she called aloud for help; and in this manner D'Albreth bore her shrieking from the tower.

Whilst this event was passing, a general panic prevailed through the army of De Foix: the Count was missing. Sir Espaign du Lyon, whom, notwithstanding his age, nothing could keep from following his master to the assault, Sir Espaign sought him everywhere, regardless of danger. "Gracious Heaven!" he exclaimed, "Sir Evan de Foix disobeyed his father! he set fire to the mine before the signal was given. Where is the Count? Heaven grant he may not have perished beneath the ruins of the tower!" De Foix was indeed missing: he had been one of the first to lead to the assault. His banner-bearer, with the banner wrapt around his body, was found dead. His esquire lay a corpse, with his skull dreadfully shattered by a fragment of the fallen tower. "Oh, then, where was the Count? where was

De Foix? Had he perished beneath the ruins?" This now seemed the only anxious object of inquiry amongst his forces. They became dispirited and disheartened; and although so nearly the victors, conquest seemed at this moment to hang on a doubtful balance: for Armagnac saw the favourable time; he rallied his men, was bearing down to attack his enemies in a body, whilst they were thus labouring under the general consternation, and seeking the Count rather than victory.

At this instant Eustace, who had gallantly assailed his foes during the attack, and had gained an advantageous point in the outer ballium, perceived D'Albreth hurrying along a female, who seemed to be struggling to free herself from his grasp. He knew not that it was Isabel, but he flew to her relief: for a woman and in distress, were sufficient claims upon his valour. As he passed rapidly towards the spot where D'Albreth held the struggling female, he observed, near the Eastern tower, a knight armed; his surcoat torn, bloody, and hanging almost in rags upon him. The knight stood with his back resting

against the wall, and by the prowess of his single arm, kept at bay several of Armagnac's people who were attempting to take him prisoner, or to kill him. "So many upon one man!" exclaimed Eustace, "and that a gallant knight too! Our lady for De Bearn! Eustace, to the rescue!" And so saying, he dashed in amidst his foemen, and threw himself before the knight, who was nearly overpowered by numbers, and must have perished. Eustace fought with the strength of youth, and the valour of true courage; and thus acting in concert with the knight, having the wall behind them, which prevented their being assailed in the rear, they succeeded in routing the assailants; who at length, tired of the conflict, turned off, and sought a combat elsewhere.

Before Eustace could speak to the knight, whose life he had thus preserved, Sir Espaign du Lyon espied the youthful champion, and coming up in all haste, he said aloud, "Haste, brave Sir Eustace, or Isabel de Greilly must be a prisoner to D'Albreth; he is forcing her away. I am old and nearly spent, I cannot save her."

Eustace heard no more; he darted from the

spot, with a speed and agility that astonished the worthy old knight, and hastened to the rescue of Isabel. Alone he could never have accomplished his purpose; for D'Albreth and his followers were a host in numbers when compared to a single opponent. De Montpensier saw whither the steps of Eustace were bending, and that a contest wholly unequal must ensue; leaving, therefore, the command of his men at arms to John de Bearn, he hastened with Agos de Guisfort, and a few brave men, to the support of Eustace. D'Albreth now made a determined stand, and resigning Isabel to the charge of one of his followers, who placed her in the rear, D'Albreth rushed forward to receive his assailants, wielding a ponderous axe, which he managed with surprising dexterity, and laid about him with such blows, that several of his opponents fell on every side.

D'Albreth perceived De Montpensier; he knew him to be a prince of France by the lilies on his surcoat; and willing to contend with so noble an adversary, he advanced, and commenced the assault, by aiming a blow at the helmet of

the young Count. Unfortunately the helmet, which, according to a fashion then much in use in France, De Montpensier had been accustomed to wear in tournaments fastened but by a single buckle, had from habit or negligence been but so fastened at the present time : it was not, therefore, secured as it should have been ; and the axe of D'Albreth with that one blow struck it off with violence to the ground. Nothing now remained on the head of De Montpensier but the basinet, or skull-cap worn beneath it. The axe of D'Albreth was again raised to fall a second time, ere De Montpensier could recover from the stunning effect of the first blow.

Agos de Guisfort saw his beloved master's danger, and rushed forward between him and certain death, at the same time aiming a skilful thrust with his sword at the fiery assailant : the sword entered through the joints of the armour at the poldron (the guard for the shoulders), and wounded D'Albreth ; but at the same instant, the axe, which he could have no longer wielded, had received its impetus, and fell upon the steel

cap of Agos de Guisfort, which, unable to resist such a blow, was clove asunder. Agos staggered, cast an affectionate look at De Montpensier, and fell dead at his feet; nor did he lose his hold of the sword, with which he had protected his master; it still seemed, as he lay on the ground, as if grasped in the lifeless hand of the bold and hardy esquire. De Montpensier, incensed at the loss of his dearest friend, placed himself over the body of Agos de Guisfort, as if to guard it from the unhallowed trample of his enemy's foot. "I will avenge thee, Agos!" he exclaimed, "or one grave shall hold both thee and me!" With these words the young Prince attacked his foes with redoubled fury; whilst Eustace rescued Isabel, and De Montpensier not only made D'Albreth prisoner, but acted deeds of valour worthy the blood of France.

Whilst this eventful fray was passing, Sir Espaign du Lyon turned to the knight who had been saved from falling, overpowered by numbers, by the valour of Eustace; but what was his surprise and joy when the knight exclaimed,

“What, Sir Espaign, do you not know, though disguised by this torn and bloody surcoat, your friend, De Foix !”

“Heaven be praised, you are alive, then !” said Sir Espaign.

“Ay,” replied De Foix ; “but the violence and impatience of my son, Evan, have nearly cost me life and liberty : he set fire to the mine before I gave the signal : the conflagration happened whilst we were so near the tower, which we had all but conquered, that those who were with me, excepting one or two, were killed on the spot ; I escaped, but was pursued, and slightly wounded : I took my stand, resolved to die rather than yield, against this wall, where I must have perished but for Eustace.”

“Haste then, for heaven’s sake !” said Sir Espaign, “haste to your people, show yourself alive to them, and we may yet gain the day ; for they are all so dispirited at your supposed death, that the tide of victory is like to turn against us.”

De Foix immediately rushed forward, and raising his visor, as he shook his uplifted sword

above his head, he shouted aloud, the well-known war cry of his house, “ Our Lady for Gaston ! De Foix to the rescue ! ” — “ De Foix — De Foix — the Count — the Count ! ” re-echoed through the ranks, and rung through the walls of the castle. The Count de Foix now headed his people ; his spirits rose with the occasion, and his courage diffused such an enthusiasm, such an excitation to bravery and daring, that the tide of victory, which was on the ebb, once more flowed in with a full current. Armagnac was completely defeated, and himself and D’Albreth were confined as prisoners within that very keep, which they had hitherto considered as the sanctuary of their liberty.

The Count de Foix, attended only by Sir Espaign du Lyon, had retired after the victory into a chamber of the keep of the castle, where the Count had disarmed, for he was wounded. He threw himself upon a couch (that very couch on which Armagnac had the night before reposed for so short a time), and Sir Espaign was busied in preparing a cordial to offer to his beloved master, when the door of the chamber

suddenly opened, and Eustace entered, bearing in his arms the still almost senseless Isabel. He placed her in a chair, and without observing the Count, who sat at some distance from him, Eustace, wholly engrossed with Isabel, knelt at her feet, and begged Sir Espaign, for Heaven's sake, to get her some water: "She is nearly fainting from alarm," said Eustace; "I brought her to this chamber to avoid the tumult of the hall, as I heard you had passed in here."

Sir Espaign replied, that wine was better than water; and taking up a flagon that stood on the table, he poured out a cup of wine, and prevailed with Isabel to drink of it. She did so, and then looking upon Eustace, and again upon Sir Espaign, she said, "I fear that my deliverer, I fear that Eustace may be wounded."

"No," answered Eustace, "I am not wounded; but, Isabel, I grieve to tell you, yet you must know it, the gallant John de Montpensier is dangerously wounded, his esquire killed."

"De Montpensier dangerously wounded!" exclaimed Isabel: "alas! alas! how will poor Jane of Boulogne bear such fatal news?" This

single sentence pronounced by the lips of Isabel in such a moment, shot like electricity through the frame of Eustace. It told him all the truth; it was Jane of Boulogne, then, who loved the young Prince; and it was for her sake, Isabel had all along appeared thus intimately connected with him. Lovers are keen-sighted: Eustace in a moment saw all the truth: overpowered by the conviction with joy and tenderness, he sunk again on his knees before Isabel, and fervently pressing her hand to his lips, he exclaimed, "You are, then, you are my own Isabel! still mine! still true!"

As Eustace uttered these words, he raised his head, and in doing so, for the first time his eye glanced towards that part of the chamber where the Count was lying on the couch. A sudden revulsion of feeling seized upon his heart, and starting from the ground, he exclaimed, as he involuntarily laid his hand upon his sword, "De Foix!"

The Count looked upon him with an expression of grief and surprise: "Why, what is this?" said he; "would you, who have been my pre-

server, become my assailant? Eustace, what means this bearing?"

"De Foix! De Foix!" replied Eustace, "this is no place for thee and me; we must meet elsewhere. A father's blood, a mother's wrongs, rise up to call thee to account. Their son demands it! for know," added Eustace, as he cast down his gauntlet, "it is the orphan heir of the murdered Sir Peter de Bearn, who bids thee defiance with his gage of battle!"

As Eustace pronounced these words, De Foix suddenly sunk back upon the couch, and covered his face with his hands, as if he would shut out the sight of Eustace from his eyes, as if he would conceal his own countenance from the observation of the being he had injured. Sir Espaign du Lyon stood motionless; he feared to behold the confusion of his master; he dared not turn his eyes on Eustace; he did but hang his head upon his bosom, and looked on the ground, a pained spectator of so much sorrow and distress. Isabel clasped her hands, and exclaimed, as she wrung them in the agony of the moment, "Oh Heaven! what is this, where will this end? Oh

do not ! do not !”—her words were drowned in grief, and she could only fix an imploring look on Eustace.

But he observed her not at this instant: his feelings presented another object to his mental vision. He thought of his mother, he remembered her dying hour; and that the murder of his father had brought her to such an end. His father's murderer was now before his sight; indignation filled his soul, and the hope of vengeance flushed his cheek, and lightened from his eye, as he turned to De Foix, and passionately exclaimed, “De Foix ! take up the gage, we must meet, where death may end the one of us; for, so help me, Heaven ! (he added, as he unsheathed his sword) I will never put up this weapon till I have revenged my father's death ! arm, defend thyself as a man ! on the instant arm ! My father's spirit can never rest in peace ! my mother's ghost will walk abroad, and call aloud for vengeance ; they will chide their son, who thus delays the chastisement of their cruel enemy, their murderer !”

Eustace spoke with all the energy of a deeply

wounded and feeling mind ; he advanced nearer to the Count, as if to rouse him into action : Sir Espaign saw the movement, and placing himself before Eustace, he laid his hand gently upon him, and said, “ Forbear, young man, do not aggravate wrongs by wrath ; the Count de Foix is wounded.”

“ Wounded !” said Eustace, and he hesitated for a moment, and then added, “ when the Count, then, shall be cured of his wound, let him promise to accept my challenge ; for mine shall be a sacrifice to justice, not to malice. I will meet De Foix on equal terms ; I will not put my strength against a wounded man.”

The Count now raised himself from the couch : he seemed to struggle with his own feelings, as if resolved to speak ; at length he said, in a low voice, “ Never ! no ! I will never meet thee in arms. Eustace, thou hast this day saved my life.”

“ Did I ?” exclaimed Eustace ; “ then may Heaven be praised ! It were no chastisement for justice if the murderer of De Bearn had fallen by any hand excepting by that of his son. I

have saved thee, Count de Foix, as the priests of old did their sacrifice, that they might trim it, to offer it upon the altar."

"No," said De Foix, "I will not; I will not accept a challenge that may peril the life of my preserver."

"Then I will force you to it," answered Eustace; "I will upbraid you till my tongue shall want words to speak the feelings of my soul; I will call you traitor! tyrant! murderer! and coward!"

"No," said De Foix, starting from the couch; "I am no coward; I have dared to sin; I have dared to kill thy father—to stab him with this hand: but I cannot, will not, dare to lift that hand against his orphan son—against the preserver of my life. Here, (the Count added, as he drew aside his vest, and bared his bosom), here, Eustace, take thy vengeance; plunge thy sword into the breast of De Foix—of thy father's murderer, and see if he will shrink from its point; if he will raise a hand against thee to ward off the blow. Am I—am I a coward?"

Eustace raised the sword: he looked upon the

Count de Foix, who stood with his breast bared before him; he looked again; he could not strike. “No!” said Eustace, as he cast the sword upon the ground, “I cannot be an assassin; vengeance is for God alone; do thou repent.”

“I do! I do!” exclaimed De Foix, and he threw himself at the feet of Eustace. “Oh thou brave and noble offspring of a most injured man, forgive—forgive the wretched penitent! Mine have been days of misery and nights of agony; but tears can never wash out blood: forgive me in thy father’s name!”

“Ask it not of me!” said Eustace; “ask it of Him who is the Father of us all. Farewell, De Foix! for ever farewell! I leave you to Heaven; and may He who has touched your heart with penitence, sanctify it, and pardon you!”

Eustace turned to depart the chamber, when Isabel, wholly subdued by the fearful scene which had just past, forgot every thing but her feelings. She caught the arm of Eustace as he was passing out, and, without speaking one word, sobbed aloud, as she hung her head upon his bosom. Sir Espaign du Lyon quitted the Count

de Foix and approached them : what he came for he knew not ; but he saw Eustace about to depart, and Isabel weeping ; his kindness of heart brought him to them ; he did not inquire of his own feelings for what purpose. “ Stay,” he said, “ stay, young man : not yet ; go not yet ; stay but a moment.

“ Suffer me to depart,” replied Eustace ; “ I cannot tarry here.”

De Foix again essayed to speak. He summoned a calmness and a fortitude that bespoke a mournful feeling with a determined purpose. “ Eustace,” he said, “ one moment stay ; and then in this world, if you will have it so, we part for ever. When we next meet, in that world beyond the grave, these last moments of conference cannot rise up to reproach thee ; and to me they may afford some poor consolation. Nay, come nearer ; let me do thee such small justice as it now remains within my power. The lands that were thy father’s, in Languedoc, became mine at his death, as he had held them of me only as a liegeman ; I will freely bestow them upon thee. You love Isabel de Greilly ;

you are beloved by her; I see it is so. She is the heiress of De Buch—take her—she is yours: may Heaven bless you both! and when you think upon the man who did you such grievous injuries, remember that De Foix, who never bowed the knee to mortal creature, wept tears of penitence at thy feet, and sorrowed that he could but give thee what thy own merit deserved, and might demand. Farewell!”

CHAPTER IX.

THE CONCLUSION.

Our revels now are ended : these our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air.

SHAKESPEARE.

THERE now remains but little to add that would interest the reader of these pages ; yet as the fate of some of the characters introduced to his acquaintance, in the course of the narrative, may excite curiosity, this chapter will contain the following brief notices ere the writer bids farewell.

The Lord of Armagnac, and his nephew, D'Albreth, for some time remained prisoners to the Count de Foix. They were removed to Orthés for their better security, and at length obtained liberty, on the payment of two hundred thou-

sand francs, as their ransom, with the restoration of the lands of the Lady Jane of Boulogne. D'Albreth, who had been chiefly corrupted by the example of his unworthy uncle, quitted his service, and following his fortunes in France, became as honourable as he was already valiant. Armagnac died during the wars with Italy.

The remains of the unhappy Lady Matilda de Bearn were interred by the side of her husband; and De Foix, as some atonement for his crimes, according to the superstitious practice of the age, caused a mass daily to be said for the repose of their souls, in the church of the Friars Minor of Orthes.

John de Bearn, the *twin* brother of the murdered Sir Peter Arnaut de Bearn (a circumstance that may account for the extraordinary resemblance they bore to each other) continued to harass the Count de Foix as long as he lived, but he could never seriously injure him, for De Foix was both a wise prince and a beloved ruler, and found his chief security in the hearts of his people. Le Mengeant continued to rob, often in the disguise of a monk, or of a pilgrim, but his

career of craft and villany at length terminated at Larre in Gascony, where he was killed in a skirmish.

John the chronicler, hearing of the miserable fate of the wretched Prior (whose remains found their unhonoured grave beneath the ruins of the fallen tower) and that Armagnac, was a prisoner to the Count, feared some of his own treacherous practices might become known to De Foix: he therefore judged it best to decamp; and, quitting his monastery, went no one knew whither. Yet it is to be supposed, that as he possessed the arts both of reading and writing, accomplishments so rare in his day, he could never need either patronage or employment; but as he was equally devoid of truth, or any one good principle, his writings could never be supposed worthy of transmission to posterity. Many of the lies and gross absurdities which now and then appear in the transcripts of various ancient chronicles, may probably be attributed to the interpolations of his pen. Long after his departure from the monastery at Orthes, the manuscript parchments of the works of Titus Livy, (which John had not staid

to carry off with him) were discovered; and it was found, upon examination, that the chronicler had proceeded far enough in his erasures to destroy many books of that historian, a loss to this day lamented by the learned world at large.

The reader perhaps may expect to hear that the high-minded Jane of Boulogne became the wife of the Count de Montpensier. Such would be poetical justice; but poetical justice entirely deserves its name, since it is seldom found other than a visionary dispensation, and not the rule of ordinary life. Yet every one must wish, that the amiable Jane had become the wife of the gallant Count: but the *truth of history* obliges us to state the contrary. Jane, faithful to the oath she had taken at the desire of De Foix, suffered him to dispose of her hand; and as policy rendered it convenient both to the Duke de Berry and to the Count de Foix to make terms between them, the unfortunate Jane of Boulogne was fixed upon as the means, and sacrificed to secure this pacific termination of their quarrels. It is true, the Duke de Berry first

demanded her in marriage for his son, John De Montpensier; but as the deceased mother of that young prince had been the sister of the Lord of Armagnac, De Foix had sworn the son of one of the house of Armagnac should never wed Jane, although she was herself so nearly related to them. De Montpensier, therefore, was wholly rejected by the Count. The objection, however, could not extend to the Duke de Berry himself; he was a widower, and he, therefore, demanded Jane in marriage, and at length obtained her for his wife. A father to rival thus successfully his own son, in our times would be deemed almost incredible; but it was thought neither shocking nor extraordinary in the age in which the event occurred. Whatever were the feelings of Jane of Boulogne, she had virtue and heroism sufficient to subdue them; for her conduct, both in public and in private life, as Duchess de Berry, is described as most amiable and exemplary by the historians of the period.

John de Montpensier long lay dangerously sick from the consequences of his wounds received at the attack on the castle of Armagnac:

his youth struggled with disease, and overcame it; but his mind was too deeply wounded to allow him to return to the court of France. He quitted his native country for the Holy Land; and the last spot he visited, ere he bid adieu to Europe, was the grave that contained the earthly remains of the brave, the generous, the faithful Agos de Guisfort.

Will of the West followed Jane of Boulogne, when Duchess de Berry, to the court of France, where, as soon as he became of age, he obtained the honour of knighthood, by her influence: but Will was never famed for deeds of arms; fine clothes, court revels, lady-love, and minstrelsy, were the objects of his pursuit; and he was looked up to as a chief patron, by all the most celebrated tailors, mummers, minstrels, maskers, and jongleurs that thronged the court. The ladies declared him to be a very pretty knight, and he hung so much about them, and seemed so fettered to them, that Will was commonly known at the court of Charles the Sixth by the appellation of the knight of the silken strings.

Eustace, or rather Sir Eustace Arnaut de Bearn, became the husband of Isabel de Greilly ; but as nothing could induce him to return to Orthes, he quitted Gascony, and pursued his fortunes at the court of France, where he soon became a distinguished favourite with the youthful monarch Charles the Sixth. This circumstance excited the envy and jealousy of the intriguing uncles of that prince ; and it is but too probable their malice might have caused the ruin of Eustace, but for the influence of the amiable Duchess de Berry, which was exerted to protect her early friend, the husband of her dear Isabel.

Eustace, convinced that a court was little calculated for the success of an honest man, who walked fairly and openly through the ways of this world, quitted it for ever ; and retiring with his beloved Isabel to his possessions in Languedoc, he there lived in his own castle, governed his own little territory with moderation and justice, and was content to seek a virtuous rather than a distinguished career. Eustace was adored by the vassals he thus generously governed ; and

they were wont to speak of him neither as lord nor chief, but as the *good Sir Eustace de Bearn*; and though history may not have enrolled his name in the catalogue of leaders of armies, or victors of countries, yet the remembrance of the just has not entirely perished even from this world.

Within an ancient gothic church, in the province of Languedoc, there may still be seen a brass tablet, partly decayed, with an imperfect inscription. It still lies where it was originally fixed, and forms a part of the pavement of the eastern aisle, facing the altar of a lateral chapel, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. This monumental brass represents the figures of an armed knight, with a lady by his side. Both appear with their hands raised in the attitude of prayer. Below their feet are seen six smaller figures, dressed in the civil habits of the fourteenth century. These are supposed to represent the children of the knight and lady. The inscription is much defaced, but the words “HIC JACET EUSTATIUS”—“UXOR EJUS ISABELLA,” are still visible, and tradition has handed down to pos-

terity the virtues of those whose remains lie beneath. For the gray-headed sacristan, as he conducts the stranger round the church, when he comes to this spot, points to the brass, and exclaims, as he strikes his staff upon the ground, "There was buried the good Sir Eustace de Bearn!"

Private virtue is seldom brilliant; and the best pursuits of advanced age are those of piety, content, and retirement. Little, therefore, can be said of Sir Espaign du Lyon. He served De Foix as long as he could serve him, quitted the court after his master's death, and continued to the close of life an honourable knight and a worthy man. Sir Espaign lived to a good old age, and though the love of telling long stories of his youth might sometimes be troublesome (for he did not always meet with a listener so patient as Froissart), yet there was so much good humour about him, that his presence did not fail to give pleasure to his friends. He died honoured, beloved, and lamented.

The Prior, who had been the tutor of Sir Evan de Foix in the paths of iniquity, fell a

sacrifice to the impatience and violent temper of his weak and misguided pupil. This occasioned his setting fire to the mine which destroyed the tower before the signal was given. For the Count, although he wished to burn the castle of Armagnac, felt desirous to spare the lives of any unfortunate beings who might be within it: he delayed, therefore, to give the signal. Evan disobeyed his father's orders, and by this act he became the instrument of the Prior's punishment, who perished with the castle, of which nothing was spared from the flames except the lofty keep.

A miserable fate, indeed, was reserved for the wretched Evan. History informs us, that although he was at last named by De Foix as his successor, his claims were set aside after the Count's death by the intrigues of the court of France, on the plea that Evan was a bastard. He quitted Gascony, and following the example of the youth of the period, pursued his fortunes at the court of Charles the Sixth, where his handsome person, and courtly manners, procured him much notice.

Whilst there engaged at a revel given in honour of the marriage of one of the queen's favourite attendants, Sir Evan appeared, with five other persons, as maskers. They were attired in tight dresses of linen, covered with pitch and fine flax, the colour of hair, so that they might appear like "salvage men." They were all fastened together with a chain, and led dancing into the presence of the queen and ladies. Unhappily, the dress of one of the maskers caught fire, from a torch in the chamber; the flames communicated to the others: four were burnt to death, and amongst them was Sir Evan de Foix.

Foix and Bearn long flourished under the rule of their valiant prince; who, next to the duties of his station, chiefly delighted in the chase. During a very hot day, in the month of August, A. D. 1391, the Count de Foix (the most celebrated, as well as the last of that title) was pursuing his favourite sport in the forest of Sauveterre, on the road to Pampeluna, in Navarre, not far distant from Orthes. Upon his return from the chase, he was suddenly taken ill, and in a few hours expired, to the inexpressible

grief of his people, who lamented him as they would a father and a friend. The writer, therefore, will conclude with offering a few remarks that may apply in an *historical* view to his character, and the times in which he lived.

Gaston Phœbus, Count de Foix, was one of the most powerful continental princes of the minor states who flourished during the fourteenth century. He was alike feared by his enemies for his valour in arms, and beloved by his subjects for his wise, just, and prudent government; and so bold was he in asserting his rights, that he would never consent to do homage to the crown of France for the territory of Bearn, which he held as a free state, dependent alone on God.

So powerful was the Count de Foix in arms, that he was feared by the kings of Castile, Aragon, and Navarre; and when the people of Toulouse revolted in their allegiance to the Duke de Berry, in consequence of the extortions and heavy imposts he laid upon them, they unanimously besought the Count to become their ruler; convinced that he would not only protect them from oppression; but that his administration of justice would prove satisfactory to all

ranks of the people. De Foix, for a time, acceded to their wishes, and this interference in the affairs of Toulouse caused that bitter enmity which subsisted for so long a period between the Duke de Berry and the Count; an enmity rendered still more violent by the Duke's having espoused for his first wife, the sister of the Lord of Armagnac. The reader is already aware that these quarrels were finally ended by the marriage of Jane of Boulogne with De Berry.

Edward the Black Prince respected both the personal qualities of De Foix and his prowess in arms; and so much did he fear him as a neighbour, who might prove too powerful for the safety of his duchy of Aquitaine, that, but for the interference of Sir John Chandos, the English prince would have commenced a war with Foix and Bearn. These jealousies, however, were afterwards completely conquered by the honourable conduct of the Count, who was magnificently entertained by Edward and his beauteous princess, during their residence at Bordeaux.

It was one part of the policy of the Count, in

order to strengthen his own power, to avoid any open rupture, either with the king of France, or the king of England; and it is surprising to observe, throughout his history, with what judgment and skill he managed to keep on good terms with both monarchs, whilst they were engaged in the most violent warfare against each other. To further this purpose, he assisted the Duke of Anjou in his pretensions to the crown of Naples, which had been resigned by the celebrated Queen Jane, to Pope Clement, and by his holiness presented to the Duke of Anjou: and there can be no doubt, that it was with a view to conciliate the Duke, that De Foix became the murderer of Sir Peter Arnaut de Bearn, under a shallow pretext of disloyalty towards himself. De Bearn had held out Lourde against Anjou; and that impregnable fortress, it was believed, would yield upon the death of its governor. It is also more than probable that De Foix would never have so far neglected the principles of his own policy, as thus openly to have opposed De Berry in the affair of Toulouse; but that the factions of which that Duke had so constantly been the instigator, rendered him

in some measure obnoxious to the cabinet of France.

De Foix was not only one of the most distinguished, but also one of the most successful princes of his time. He knew well that the chief security of greatness lies in the hearts of the people, and he omitted no measure that might cultivate the good-will of his own. Whilst other provinces were groaning under the yoke of tyranny, conquest, or oppression; now ravaged by the marauding free bands, or now plundered by a neighbouring state, those of Foix and Bearn enjoyed a security that resulted from the active martial spirit, and the wise administration of their ruler. So strict was the justice of De Foix, that he allowed not the smallest injury to be offered to the lowest of his subjects within his dominions, without awarding immediate redress; and it was in consequence of this wise government that the taxes and levies he laid upon them were always paid without a murmur; as the people considered these imposts the necessary supplies for their own security.

Of the military talents of the Count, history bears ample record; and the gallant exploit by

which he, and the Captal de Buch, so valiantly rescued from the most imminent danger the Duchess of Orleans and her fair companions at Meaux, evinces the personal bravery of his character, and the romantic spirit of the times.

De Foix was munificent in his patronage. Himself a soldier, a statesman, a scholar, and a poet, he knew well how to value and distinguish the merits of another in those arts and sciences that adorn alike the field, the closet, or the court. Generous to profusion in his rewards of valour, learning, and talent, he was surrounded by such as had distinguished themselves in either. Courteous, affable, and serious; a contemner of the frivolous and the vain, his court became remarkable for the gallantry, the sense, and the refinement of its manners, even in an age when chivalry had made a gallant and polite demeanour the characteristic of every member of its august body.

Strict in the observance of religious duties, the Count omitted no occasion of public or of private worship; and alms were daily distributed to the poor at his castle gates. These were open to all princes, knights, squires, travellers, pil-

grims, and minstrels who chose to enter within them : and although he usually resided at his castle of Orthes, which was one of the largest and most magnificent upon the continent ; yet so numerous was his household and his guests, that many were often lodged in the town, for want of room to contain them at the palace. The splendour that reigned within its walls was of the most princely kind : every apartment glittered with gold and silver ; and his jewels were scarcely less in value than the regalia of the kings of France ; whilst the tournaments of Orthes were such as attracted the company of nobles, knights, and squires from all parts of Europe.

The Count took great delight in hearing the ballads and roundelays of minstrels ; but being an enemy to all folly, he was perhaps the only prince or noble of his time who would never suffer a clown or jester near his person ; a creature generally favoured by courts, and considered as forming a part of the state and entertainment of the lord to whom he belonged.

De Foix much delighted in the chase, and was so fond of dogs that he usually kept sixteen

hundred of them in his kennel. The Count never supped till midnight, when he left his chamber attended by torch-bearers, and chamberlains, who conducted him into the great hall, where he took his seat at the board, surrounded by his court attired in splendid robes.

After the death of his son young Gaston, whilst at supper, he was never spoken to, unless he first addressed some individual. He would often listen to minstrels, or cause one of his secretaries to read aloud to him. And although the Count had much delight in looking at the fanciful dishes (which at this period were made to represent some elegant and ingenious device), yet he never partook of them, but would send them away for the trenchers of his knights and squires.

From Froissart, we learn that the Count was one of the handsomest men of his time, tall, and finely formed; his countenance "fair and ruddy, with gray and amorous eyes, that gave delight whenever he chose to express affection." "In short," continues the chronicler, "every thing considered, though I had before been in several courts of kings, dukes, princes, counts,

and noble ladies, I was never at one which pleased me more, nor was I ever more delighted with feats of arms, than at this of the Count de Foix. There were knights and squires to be seen in every chamber, hall, and court, going backwards and forwards, and conversing on arms and love. Every thing honourable was there to be found. All intelligence from distant countries was there to be learnt; for the gallantry of the Count had brought visitors from all parts of the world." And he afterwards adds: "To speak briefly and truly, the Count de Foix was perfect in person and in mind; and no contemporary prince could be compared with him for sense, honour, or liberality."

Such were the virtues of this distinguished prince; and would that we might here conclude in the words just quoted, this slight and imperfect sketch of his character! But, alas! truth forbids it. The Count de Foix, as may be seen in the history of human nature, like many other men who are distinguished by the possession of great powers of mind, enthusiasm, and energy of feeling, had nothing in his character of mediocrity. His virtues shone

as the clearest light, bright and useful ; his vices were as the darkest shade, deep and dangerous. Violent in his feelings, and easily provoked to passion, he was sometimes hurried by the force of them into the commission of acts cruel and atrocious. His policy was refined, often treacherous, and always subtle.

When no sacrifice was required, De Foix preferred the paths of virtue ; but if an end could not be accomplished by direct means, he scrupled not to adopt such as were expedient. He took no delight in wanton crimes ; but crime was no barrier to the achievement of his plans, where there existed a supposed necessity for its commission. Cool in counsel, but violent in feeling, resentful, and politic, the memory of the Count de Foix, notwithstanding his valour, his patronage of learning and science, his wisdom and munificence, remains stained by some dark spots of guilt that nothing can efface.

Yet in thus reprobating his vices, justice demands that we should consider them, not by the standard of our own sense of moral rectitude, in these enlightened times, but by that of the period in which he lived. All men are more or

less the creatures of circumstance and education, and of none can we form a just estimate, unless we view them in reference to the religion, the manners of the times, and of the country in which they were educated and flourished. The best apology, therefore, that can be offered for the Count de Foix will be thus to consider him : that his virtues emanated from a mind naturally great and noble, and which, had he lived in a different age, might have shone with all the milder graces of humanity.

But the nobles of this period were from their infancy accustomed to arbitrary power, surrounded by their vassals, subservient to their will, and with no one about them to control the headstrong effects of their passions. Trained to the dangers of the tournament, brought up, as it were, amid the din of arms, and early led into the battle, the mind became accustomed to the sight of human slaughter, and looked with calm indifference at the effusion of human blood. Fearless for their own lives, the nobles thought the life of another of little value, and it was sacrificed often on the slightest provocation or offence. The tutors of their childhood taught

them that personal courage was the greatest of all virtues, and an honourable name in arms the highest aim of human ambition. Mercy and humility might be now and then the theme of the monk, but they were little understood by the lord of arbitrary power.

Christianity, that only light to guide the mind of man, unerring, through the wilderness of this world, was then entirely obscured, or at least frequently perverted. Its name spread through Europe, but its principles remained unknown. Christianity was made to consist in the strict observance of certain forms and ceremonies, and in the dark superstitions of the monks. These sometimes heated the imagination, but never touched the heart; their effects often led to a seclusion in the cloister, but seldom influenced the moral conduct of domestic life. And the dangerous precept which taught that the worst crimes of an abandoned life might be effaced at the hour of death by assuming the habit of a recluse (a thing often practised at the point of death), or by leaving a sum of money to a monastery, induced such

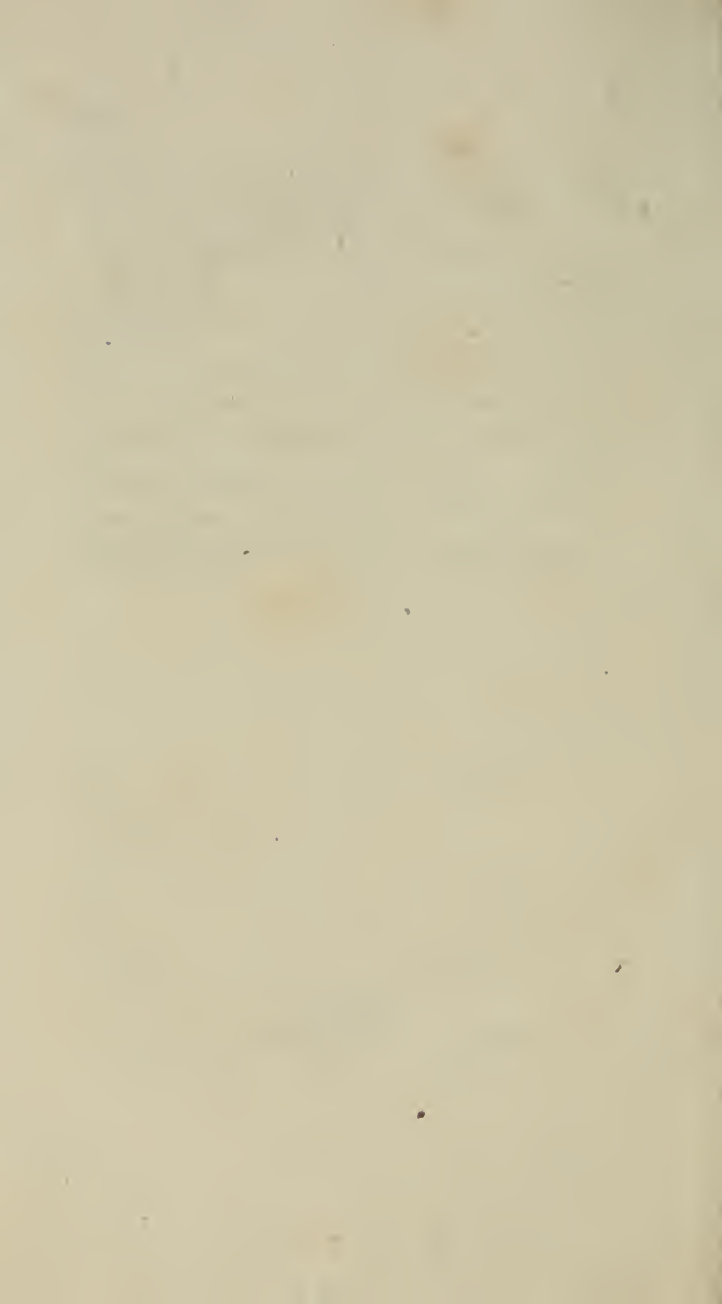
a fearful catalogue of sins laid up to be repented of at leisure, that we frequently shudder, and turn with horror from the account.

When we calmly reflect upon this state of Christianity and of society, more especially as it influenced the nobility—who from possessing greater power, were likewise exposed to greater temptations to its abuse—we shall rather wonder at those resplendent characters of virtue, in which many of their acts are written, than we can feel surprised at the dark picture of their crimes.

THE END.

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